marvel chronicles

Welcome to the first installment of a column that will trace the high points of the history of Marvel Comics from the very beginning. What Stan Lee has dubbed "the Marvel Age of Comics" began with FANTASTIC FOUR #1 in 1961. But Marvel as we now know it was not abruptly created out of nothing. The comics company now known as Marvel had already existed for over twenty years under names such as Timely and Atlas, publishing a wide variety of comics: Westerns, romance, horror, science fiction, and, yes, super heroes. In looking back over "pre-Marvel" history we can see characters and concepts that were the forerunners of the familiar Marvel heroes of today. Marvel's history began explosively with the release of MARVEL COMICS #1 in 1939 (which Marv reprinted in har cover in 1990 the book starr ...ll's origin: Human Torc created by Ca Burgos, and the Torch's future nemesis, Namor th Sub-Mariner, created by Bill Everett. These cha ...actery were startlingly different from the sup heroes created in these early years. F ...one thing, neither was tr human: the Torch was an androi who could turn into a creature of liv ing flame, and Namor was the prince of an undersea race, with pointed ears like a demon. ...more significantly, at fi they were both alien from humanity: the Sub-Mariner, in fact, declared a one-man war o...he human race for i alleged depredations against his people.

"BACK IN MY DAY, YOU DIDN'T NEED FANCY POWERS TO BE A HERO, JUST A FANCY TAILOR.

"I DID SOME GOOD, MAYBE NOT AS MUCH AS CAPTAIN AMERICA OR THE HUMAN TORCH, BUT GOOD NONETHELESS. I FELT PRETTY DARN GOOD ABOUT IT, TOO.

"THEN, ONE DAY, AN INNOCENT BYSTANDER TOOK A BULLET MEANT FOR ME...AND DIED.

I CAUGHT THE BEAST HIM BADLY WHAT WAS THE BECAUSE I BROKEN MY JOB LY ENOUGH, NT LIFE NURSED IN PRIME.

The concept of the alienated hero proved essential to the Marvel ... the 1960s, and thus it is no wonder that Stan Lee and Jack Kirb... created a new Torch and revived the Sub-Mariner in the early issu... of FANTASTIC FOUR.

In 1941, less than a year before America entered World War II, the brillia... young team of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby created comics' leading patriot... hero Captain America, as well as his partner, Buck... and his eternal nemesis, the Red Skull. Appropriatel... Captain America has since been one of Marvel... flagship characters. Jack Kirby, of course, would g... on to become one of the primary creative forces behir... the Marvel of the 1960s. Another of the founding fathe... of '60s Marvel, Stan Lee, first began writing for Marv... with CAPTAIN AMERICA.

"I WISHED TO ATONE FOR MY FAILINGS, FOR THE ARROGANCE I HAD APPROACHED CRIMEFIGHTING, AND FOR YEARS OBSESSED OVER HOW I COULD DO SO.

"RETREATED INTO MY WEALTH AND MY GUILT...

During the 1940s, Timely, like its rival comics companies, came up with an enormous number of costumed characters within a relatively short time. None of them rivaled the popularity of the "big three," and some lasted no more than a few issues. Still, a number of them have relevance to the Marvel of today.

For example, some of today's familiar Marvel heroes inherited their names from predecessors in the Golden Age, such as the original Black Widow (who makes a cameo appearance in the closing scene of MARVELS #1). Simon and Kirby's Golden Age Vision was an eerie visitor from another dimension. Roy Thomas and John Buscema based the modern day Vision on his memorable forebear, though Stan Lee had Roy make the new Vision an android rather than a supernatural entity.

MARVEL COMICS #1 also starred the first Angel, a mustachioed bu... winglessed costumed crimefighter. Oddly enough, in recent years Peter David and Mark Gruenwald both wrote stories about the original Angel's fate in the modern day Marvel Universe. Peter made him into a homeless man, still surprisingly athletic, who defends his underground community, in CLOAK and DAGGER and HULK whereas Mark made him an enfeebled million... aire who funded vigilantes in the USAGENT limited series. The contradiction was resolved when the two Angels were pronounced brothers who had shared their costumed identity.

by Peter Sanderson

rvel Chronicles

Chapter 1: Before The Fantastic Four, 1939-1961

In the 1970s Roy revived numerous Golden Age heroes in THE INVADERS, a Marvel series set during the second World War. Among them was the Destroyer, Stan Lee's first major super hero creation, a ruthless warrior fighting behind enemy lines; he was like a 1940s Punisher unleashed against the Nazis. Marvel has subsequently used the name "Destroyer" time and again, most notably for Odin's indestructible robot in THOR and for Adam Warlock's ally Drax the Destroyer. In his more recent INVADERS limited series Roy brought back the original Vision as well as the Blazing Skull, whose visual design clearly inspired the Ghost Rider.

A few other 40s heroes have popped up in surprising places lately; notably, John Byrne revived the Blonde Phantom as the She-Hulk's pudgy but good-humored confidant.

Although super heroes were the mainstay of the comics industry of the 1940s, other genres thrived as well. The adventures of teenager Patsy Walker go all the way back to 1945. After her comic finally ended decades later she evolved into the Marvel super heroine known as Hellcat. Some of Marvel's longest running Western heroes also debuted in the 1940s, including Kid Colt and the Rawhide Kid, both of whom were sharpshooters whom the law had unjustly condemned as outlaws, thus fitting into the traditional Marvel motif of heroes at odds with society.

By the beginning of the 1950s America's initial infatuation with costumed heroes had run its course; all of Timely's super heroes vanished.

Several years later a brief but unsuccessful attempt was made to revive the big three. In the 1970s writer Steve Englehart "revealed" the rabidly anti-Communist Captain America to have been an impostor; the "Bucky" impostor who was his partner became the character now known as Nomad.

The 1950s produced three minor classics of lasting value for Marvel readers. First and foremost was THE BLACK KNIGHT by Stan Lee and artist Joe Maneely, a short-lived series set in the days of King Arthur, that managed to integrate the costumed hero motif into a world inspired by Prince Valiant. Sir Percy of Scandia, who posed as a harmless fop but fought evildoers as the helmeted Black Knight, was the ancestor of Dane Whitman, the Black Knight of today's Avengers.

MARVEL BOY had been raised on the planet Uranus and returned to his native Earth to battle crime with his superhuman abilities. Though his series lasted a mere two issues, Roy Thomas revived him as a villain in FANTASTIC FOUR; Quasar inherited Marvel Boy's costume and powers, and Justice of the New Warriors originally went by Marvel Boy's name.

The other 50s series of note was THE YELLOW CLAW, a politically incorrect thriller in the mode of Sax Rohmer's Fu Manchu novels, whose title villain would in the 1960s become one of the most memorable adversaries for SHIELD Director Nick Fury.

By the late 1950s and 1960s the pieces were all in place for the creation of the Marvel of today. Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko were collaborating on stories for STRANGE TALES, TALES OF SUSPENSE, TALES TO ASTONISH and JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY, series that would soon become showcases for the Marvel heroes of the 1960s. At this point, however, Stan and his collaborators were mostly turning out short science fiction stories, in the style of 1950s B-movies, with twist endings. Their most distinctive work of this period was their monster stories, featuring an unending parade of gigantic creatures with names like Googam, Son of Goom, the Blip, and, unforgettably, the talking, diapered dragon Fin Fang Foom. The stories now have a decided camp value, redeemed by the dynamic power of the artwork by Kirby and Ditko.

That art demonstrated that its creators were clearly capable of turning their talents to greater things. All that Lee, Kirby, and Ditko needed was the go-ahead to create a new line of super heroes, as you shall see in our next installment.

Stan Lee, amazingly, scripted virtually all of Marvel's super hero books in the early and mid-1960s. Equally astonishing was that he found another writer just as prolific to take over writing many of those series as Stan's editorial responsibilities grew. Roy Thomas became the first major Marvel writer who had started out as a Marvel fan.

Thomas's premier assignment was THE AVENGERS. When we last left them, the Wasp had inexplicably agreed to wed a masked man named Yellowjacket who claimed to have disposed of her missing boyfriend, Henry Pym! With no way to prove foul play, the Avengers went along with the wedding, reminiscent of Reed and Sue Richards's wedding. Proving just how hard it was to get good help those days, the caterers turned out to be the Ringmaster and his Circus of Crime! In the ensuing fray, Yellowjacket turned out to be Henry Pym, who had developed a temporary case of Multiple Personality Disorder, a result of exposure to a strange gas! The Wasp had known all along that Yellowjacket was Pym, but decided that if he would only propose to her as Yellowjacket, she should take advantage of the opportunity. Some might say Jan was being manipulative but once he had regained his true personality, Hank was glad they were married. Years later this incident would prove to have been the first step towards his mental breakdown.

RAVONNA!!! HAVE I GAINED YOUR LOVE AT LAST--ONLY TO HAVE WON IT--TOO LATE??
PERHAPS 'TIS JUST AS WELL MY LORD...
PERHAPS-- 'TWAS NEVER MEANT-- TO BE--!

This was merely the start of an exciting year for THE AVENGERS! Having decided to retain his new Yellowjacket guise, Pym gave Hawkeye his size-changing formula, thereby making him the new Goliath. The virtually indestructible metal adamantium first turned up in issue #66, along with its inventor, Dr. Myron MacLain, as the evil robot Ultron reconstructed himself in an adamantium body.

Issue #69 marked the beginning of a landmark epic. The Avengers' archenemy from the future, Kang the Conqueror, was desperate to revive his true love, the Princess Ravonna, who had been left on the brink of death back in issue #24. The alien Grandmaster, an obsessive gambler, making his first appearance, offered to grant Kang temporary power over life and death if the Conqueror could defeat him in a contest. Kang forced the Avengers to serve as his champions.

I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT OF THIS LONG AGO!
NOBODY WOULD EVER RECOGNIZE THE SKULL WITHOUT HIS MASK!
AND YET--WHAT IS THE SKULL'S MORE PRIZED POSSESSION?
I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD TO WORRY ABOUT THE POLICE--OR ANYONE!

As their first team of opponents, the Grandmaster brought together the Squadron Sinister, a band of costumed villains based on familiar super-heroic archetypes: later stories would reveal them to be evil counterparts of the Squadron Supreme, the greatest heroes of an alternate Earth. As if this were not enough, when the "game" took three Avengers back to 1942 Paris, they had to battle Captain America, the original Human Torch, and the Sub-Mariner as they were back then: in effect, this was the first appearance of Marvel's wartime team, the Invaders. Thanks to the Avengers, Kang won the game, but he chose to use his new power of life and death, which he could utilize only once, to kill the Avengers rather than revive Ravonna. The new Black Knight saved the Avengers and was rewarded with admission to their ranks. As for Ravonna, we would learn decades later that the Grandmaster secretly revived her and told her of Kang's

betrayal, leading her to become the conqueror's most implacable enemy.

Some of Thomas's best work of the year were his collaborations with artist Gene Colan on the DOCTOR STRANGE series. Strange has always won devoted fans but unfortunately, never enough of them to keep his comic going permanently. And so, only a year after it began, the first DOCTOR STRANGE series came to an end. The final issue, #189, inaugurated an intriguing new storyline concerning the Undying Ones. These mysterious otherdimensional creatures were clearly inspired by the classic short stories of fantasy writer H. P. Lovecraft. Thomas would be forced to finish this serial in other Marvel series in the coming year.

Doctor Strange's colleague from STRANGE TALES, Nick Fury, fared no better in his new series, which was canceled with issue #15. Even Fury himself got "canceled": in his farewell issue he was apparently assassinated by a HYDRA gunman named Bull's-Eye (no relation to Daredevil's later opponent). Of course, appearances were deceiving here, as readers would learn in another year.

Stan Lee had by now returned to THE INCREDIBLE HULK and so on resurrected the Green Goliath's greatest enemy, the Leader. Shortly afterwards, Thomas succeeded Stan on this series, too, and startled readers by curing Bruce Banner for the first time. Now Banner could not only change into the Hulk at will, but maintained his normal intelligence and personality in his monstrous form. Confident that happiness could at last be his, Banner was finally about to wed Betty Ross in her childhood home. But the Leader and his flunky, the Rhino, wrecked his hopes by firing a gamma ray blast at Banner during the wedding ceremony. As a result Banner reverted to the savage Hulk and demolished the house in the ensuing battle. It would take nearly two more decades for the wedding to take place.

Stan Lee wound up his long run on DAREDEVIL and once again, Roy Thomas took over the writing reins. Partnered with artist Gene Colan, they introduced the first Marvel character to be named Death's Head: a spectral masked rider who proved to be the father of Daredevil's longtime love interest, Karen Page. Dr. Paxton Page had been driven mad by exposure to radiation in his research. After Dr. Page died, Daredevil finally revealed to Karen that he was really her former boss, the blind attorney Matt Murdock, in issue #57.

Thomas was not the only valuable addition to Marvel's growing ranks of writers. Newly arrived at Marvel, Archie Goodwin introduced Iron Man to one of his principal villains, the Controller, in issue #12. Five issues later, Goodwin unveiled one of Iron Man's most eccentric and dangerous foes, Mordecai Midas, a multimillionaire who dressed as if he lived in ancient Greece and was too obese to walk. Midas employed an acrobatic agent named Madame Masque, who proved to be Iron Man's adversary Whitney Frost [See last issue. —Tim], her face terribly scarred behind the mask she now wore. She now fell in love with Stark, with consequences that would reverberate for decades to come. As for Stark, he underwent experimental surgery that repaired his damaged heart with synthetic tissue, at last freeing him from the greatest threat to his and Iron Man's life.

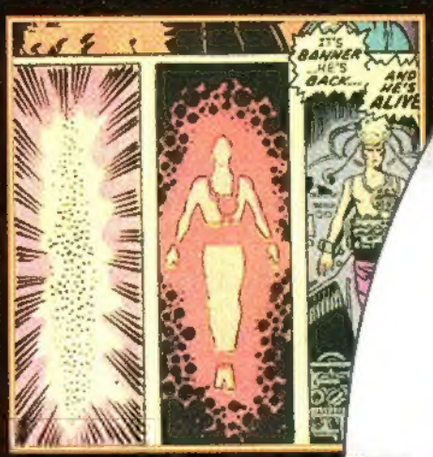
It was a year of constant change for the original CAPTAIN MARVEL, as Marvel writers grappled with the dilemma of making this new series work. In issue #17, Roy Thomas and Gil Kane came up

with the concept for Mar-Vell that would last. He was bonded to teenager Rick Jones in such a way that when one was on Earth, the other was trapped in the otherdimensional Negative Zone. By striking together the Kree nega-bands they wore on their wrists, they could change places. Thomas and Kane had thus concocted an interesting variation on the Golden Age Captain Marvel, who could switch between the forms of a boy and a super-powered adult.

I STILL LIVE--AS YOU CAN SEE!
I HAVE COME TO END YOU--
REMEMBER--A GAMMA-RAY ACCIDENT AFFECTED MY BRAIN--JUST AS IT AFFECTED THE HULK'S STRENGTH!
TO SHOW YOU HOW TO OVERCOME THE HULK--TO KEEP HIM POWERLESS--FOREVER!
IT'S THE MYSTERIOUS GENIUS KNOWN AS--THE LEADER!!
BUT--I THOUGHT HE WAS DEAD!!
SO I ALONE CAN SHOW YOU HOW TO CRUSH HIM!

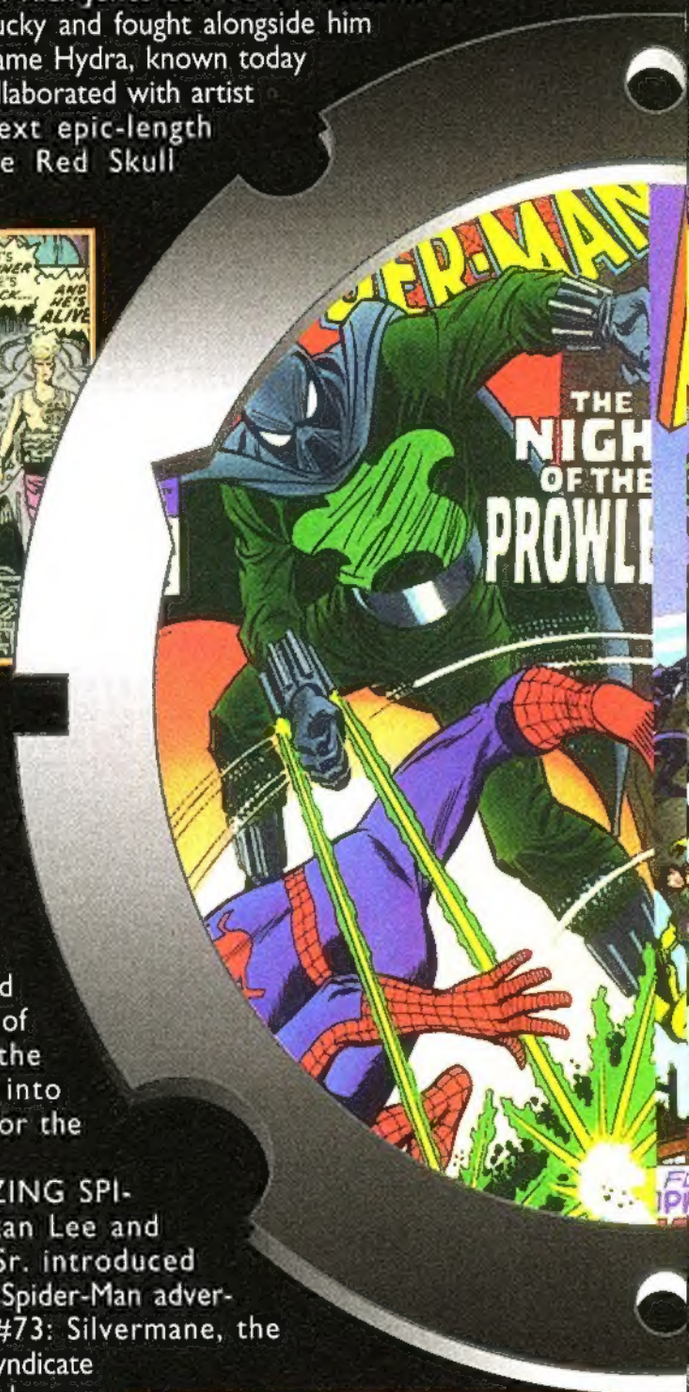
So, you may ask, just what was Stan Lee doing all this time? Plenty! For one thing, he and John Buscema continued their memorable collaboration on THE SILVER SURFER, pitting the Surfer in combat against Thor in issue #4 and raising the ghost of the Flying Dutchman to serve as Mephisto's pawn in issues #s 8 and 9.

Stan Lee teamed with Jim Steranko on a classic trilogy of CAPTAIN AMERICA issues in which Rick Jones donned the costume of Cap's wartime partner Bucky and fought alongside him against a new villain, Madame Hydra, known today as the Viper. Lee then collaborated with artist Gene Colan on the next epic-length storyline in which the Red Skull recovered the virtually all-powerful Cosmic Cube and used it to switch bodies with Cap. Trapped in his enemy's body, Cap was on the run from the law until he—and Lee and Colan—remembered that the Skull's grotesque visage was only a mask and took it off! (That trick wouldn't work today; now the Skull's head really does look like a red skull!)



Hiding out on an island in issue #117, Cap encountered Sam Wilson, who had an uncanny rapport with his trained falcon Redwing. Under Cap's guidance Sam became his new costumed partner, the Falcon! The Captain regained his true body, of course, and the Cube melted into nothingness—for the time being.

STILL, I CAN HARDLY BLAME YOU FOR NOT NOTICING, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE...
...THAT OUR JOINT FORMULA DOESN'T STOP ME FROM EVER BECOMING THE HULK!
NO, IT WAS DESIGNED TO DO SOMETHING FAR, FAR BETTER!
NAMELY, IT SHOULD ENABLE ME...
TO CONTROL THE TRANS-FORMATIONS!
HE'S CHANGED INTO THE HULK, AGAIN!
YET, HIS VOICE...HIS WORDS... ARE STILL THOSE OF BRUCE BANNER!



In AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, Stan Lee and John Romita Sr. introduced another major Spider-Man adversary in issue #73: Silvermane, the elderly but still dangerously cunning leader in the crime syndicate known as the Maggia, along with this Maggia cohorts, lawyer Caesar Cicero and enforcer Man-Mountain Marko.

Issue #78 saw the introduction of Hobie Brown, an inventor who hoped to make himself into a hero by committing a theft in his costumed identity of the Prowler and then returning the property in his true guise. Hobie's plan went awry, but the Prowler ended up as another of Marvel's growing number of African-American super heroes.

Stan Lee and Jack Kirby continued to astonish readers of THOR, first with a war in space pitting Thor and Ego the Living Planet against Galactus, and then by driving Thor into "warrior madness" in his battle against the artificially created humanoid

THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!
I WASN'T QUITE SURE BEFORE, JUST HOW STRONG ALL YOUR BRAIN-BLASTING MADE ME!
BUT NOW I KNOW I'M STRONGER--FASTER THAN EVER!
BEAT ME TO THE HULK, NOW!
THE RHINO'LL MAKE MINCEMEAT OUT OF 'IM!!
NO, RHINO, NOT JUST YET!

then known only as "Him," who would one day take on the name Adam Warlock.

1969 brought with it the last two great Lee and Kirby FANTASTIC FOUR multi-part epics, each of which paid homage in part to a classic 1960s TV series. In the first, running from FF #84 through #87, the Fantastic Four found themselves in a village in Doctor Doom's kingdom of Latveria. The surroundings were charming and the villagers seemingly friendly, but the FF knew they were now held captive there by Doom and his futuristic technology—much like Number Six in "The Prisoner."

Shortly afterwards, in issues #90 through 93, Lee and Kirby tipped their hats to gladiator movies, gangster movies, and even an episode of "Star Trek" in a new serial in which the Thing was captured by a Skrull slave master to serve as a gladiator in games held on one of the Skrulls' distant planets. Strangely, the shape-changing Skrulls of the world on which Ben found himself had adopted the forms of Prohibition-era Earth gangsters!

Perhaps the most significant events of the year, though, occurred in THE X-MEN. This book continued its back-up series recounting the original members' origins, but more importantly, Roy Thomas joined forces with penciler Neal Adams and inker Tom Palmer to create the most visually spectacular adventures in THE X-MEN's original run. It began with issue #56. Scott Summers' long-lost brother Alex, introduced two issues previously, was held captive in Egypt by the man calling himself the Living Pharaoh. The Pharaoh was a mutant who could only achieve his full power if he cut Alex off from the cosmic rays that gave him his mutant powers. Finally, the Pharaoh succeeded, transforming himself into the colossal, stone-like Living Monolith.

No sooner was the Monolith defeated than the X-Men faced a newly constructed squadron of Sentinels, perhaps the most formidable version they have confronted before or since. In this saga, Alex Summers first adopted his costumed identity of Havok and met his future girlfriend Lorna Dane.

Each succeeding X-MEN story swept the team to a new location, and so they journeyed to the Antarctic on the trail of their new nemesis, Karl Lykos, a man whose vampiric absorption of mutant energy transformed him into the bizarre were-pterodactyl Sauron. From there the X-Men traveled back to Ka-Zar's Savage Land, where they found Magneto and his sinister new creations, the Savage Land Mutates.

YOU REMEMBER MY NAME!
PERHAPS THEN YOU CAN FURTHER REMEMBER THAT I AM A MAN WITH ONE SOLE, OVERWHELMING GOAL...
A GOAL YOU ELECTED TO HELP ME ATTAIN, AT NO SMALL BENEFIT TO YOURSELF, SIR!
NOW, I LEARN TO MY DISMAY, MR. STARK, YOU ACT NOT AS A HELP, BUT A HINDRANCE!

Up until now THE X-MEN had been considered one of Marvel's second-rung series. But under Thomas, Adams, and Palmer THE X-MEN stood revealed as a cutting edge series, replete with potential for greatness. These stories showed the way for the age of the "new" X-Men that would begin six years hence.

By PETER SANDERSON

With the dawn of 1970 not only were the Sixties over but the Silver Age of Comics, the first phase of "the Marvel Age of Comics," was likewise fast drawing to a close. The great explosion of creativity that marked Marvel's first decade was fading, and, with a few notable exceptions like Roy Thomas, the next generation of writers and artists, who had been inspired by the brilliance of 1960s Marvel Comics, had yet to arrive.

Marvel Chronicles: 1970

Perhaps the event that truly marked the end of Marvel's Silver Age was the departure of Jack Kirby, without whose revolutionary, dynamic artwork and dazzling concepts "The Marvel Age of Comics" would be unimaginable. Though still graced by wonderful graphics, his final issues of THE FANTASTIC FOUR are mere shadows of the greatness of the book in the 1960s. Still, in issue #94, Kirby and Lee created yet one more of the FF's memorable, long-running characters: the grandmotherly witch Agatha Harkness, who became young Franklin's governess. How a scientist like Reed Richards ever learned about her has still never been explained.

Kirby left Marvel after completing issue #102, which began a new storyline in which Magneto persuaded the Sub-Mariner to lead a new Atlantean attack on the surface world; it remained for Stan Lee and the series's new artist, John Romita Sr., to have Namor join with the FF in defeating the Machiavellian mutant.

In THOR Lee and Kirby produced another last great epic. The Thunder God led the forces of Asgard against the gigantic fire demon Surtur. This tale must have deeply impressed writer/artist Walter Simonson, who constructed his own first great THOR storyline around Surtur decades later. Here too Kirby left after beginning a new storyline in which Loki switched bodies with Thor. In this case Stan Lee finished the story in collaboration with penciler Neal Adams, who was then at the height of his artistic prowess.

Signs that Marvel's Silver Age creativity was flagging were on view in some surprising places. It was not a memorable year for CAPTAIN AMERICA, in which the Falcon continued to make guest appearances, or for DAREDEVIL, in which the hero's girlfriend Karen Page inaugurated her ill-fated career as an actress, even appearing on "Strange Secrets," a daytime Gothic soap opera that presumably was writer Roy Thomas's nod to the original "Dark Shadows," then still in production. IRON MAN began the year well, as writer Archie Goodwin chronicled how Tony Stark's girlfriend Janice Cord was killed in the midst of Iron Man's battle against the new

Crimson Dynamo and the Titanium Man. But afterwards that series likewise rapidly sank into mediocrity.

SUB-MARINER did not have his best year, either, but Roy Thomas still gave the series some of its highlights in 1970. DOCTOR STRANGE had abruptly been cancelled the year before just as Thomas and Gene Colan had embarked on a very promising storyline concerning the Undying Ones, otherdimensional creatures who once ruled Earth and now sought to return. They were inspired by the "Cthulhu mythos" originated in the short stories of the great horror writer H. P. Lovecraft. In SUB-MARINER #22 Namor journeyed to Boston, where he encountered Strange still on the track of his new nemeses. Strange vanished into their own realm at the issue's end, and the story would soon resume in yet another Marvel series.

Stan Lee and Herb Trimpe began the year in THE INCREDIBLE HULK by continuing their three-part epic about the return of his archenemy, the Leader. As he had so often before, Roy Thomas soon took over the writing reins from Stan, and his first major task was to finish off the Undying Ones saga. Cultists sent the Hulk into the Undying Ones dimension, where he found the entrapped Doctor Strange and defeated their leader, the Nameless One. One of the cultists was a young woman named Barbara Norriss, whose body would later become the host for the spirit of Brunnhilda the Valkyrie, who would be introduced later that same year in THE AVENGERS. On returning with Banner to Earth, Strange declared that having won this victory he was now retiring as Sorcerer Supreme. Readers surely found this hard to believe, and Strange would soon return to the mystic arts, but not this year.

In HULK #130 Thomas split the Green Goliath into separate beings for the first time: Bruce Banner coexisting with a savage Hulk out to destroy him. The two merged back into a single entity by issue #131, which also introduced the Hulk's new kid sidekick, an African-American from the Watts section of Los Angeles named Jim Wilson.

But there were some Marvel series in 1970 that had much more success in escaping the creative doldrums. Stan Lee and John Romita Sr. were still at the helm of THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. True, this book too had its share of disappointments that year, like the story that introduced one of Spidey's lamer antagonists, an Australian high-jumper named (what else?) the Kangaroo. But the high spots in

1970 more than made up for such misfires.

In issues #83 through #85 of AMAZING the Web-Slinger found himself caught in the middle of a conflict between the Kingpin and a mysterious new criminal mastermind, the Schemer. The latter proved to be the Kingpin's son Richard, in the first of a series of masked identities he would adopt in the years to come.

In the following issue Spider-Man encountered the recently reformed Black Widow, whom series artist John Romita Sr. gave a brand new look, with a skin-tight black jumpsuit reminiscent of that worn by Mrs. Peel in television's "The Avengers." The Widow's hair also changed, from black to red without explanation or even comment, leaving readers ever since to puzzle over whether she was a natural brunette or redhead.

The most significant event in Spider-Man's life that year, though, occurred in issue #90. It

was one of the tragedies that have indelibly marked Peter Parker's life. During a furious battle between Spider-Man and Doctor Octopus atop a building, the Doctor caused heavy debris to plummet from the roof. Below, watching the combatants, was retired police captain George Stacy, the kindly father of Peter Parker's beloved Gwen. Alarmed, the crippled Stacy pushed a child out of the path of the falling debris, only to be struck down by it himself. Spider-Man rushed to the captain's side, and was startled when with his final breaths the dying man addressed him as Peter. Captain Stacy had known his secret but had not betrayed him, and had thus given his blessing to Spider-Man loving his daughter.

Ironically, the public initially blamed Spider-Man for the respected police captain's demise. The reverberations of this landmark in Spider-Man's life continued to be felt a quarter century later. The final issue of Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross's MARVELS shows how photojournalist Phil Sheldon sought to clear Spider-Man of the charge of murdering George Stacy, only to become a witness to the death of Gwen. And Captain Stacy's brother Arthur, introduced in 1971, has recently returned to the Spider-Books to reopen the investigation of Captain Stacy's death.

The redesigned Black Widow won her own series in AMAZING ADVENTURES, one of the two new "split books" Marvel launched in 1970. Each of them featured two series, much as books like TALES OF SUSPENSE had in the 1960s. The Widow shared AMAZING ADVENTURES with THE INHUMANS by Lee and Kirby.

But even more interesting was its sister title ASTONISHING TALES. The lead feature here was KA-ZAR, which also originally was crafted by Lee and Kirby. But no sooner had Kirby drawn the second installment, which introduced the strange being called Garokk the Petrified Man, than he left this series and Marvel as well. It was left to two newcomers to chart the history of how an English sailor of the 15th Century had been transformed into the immortal godlike creature: writer Gerry Conway and penciler Barry Smith, today known as Barry Windsor-Smith.

Yet perhaps the finest of these new "split book" series was DOCTOR DOOM in ASTONISHING TALES, illustrated by the legendary Wally Wood. In the early issues Doom faced a revolt led by the true heir to the Latverian throne, Prince Rudolfo, and his insect-like alien ally, the Faceless One.

Of the core Marvel series, the one that had the best year by far in 1970 was THE AVENGERS. Roy Thomas, the first of a new generation of Marvel writers, continued to work at the height of his creativity, often in collaboration this year with the premier art team in AVENGERS history, John Buscema and Tom Palmer [For more on Tom, see last issue.—Tim].

The year began with issue #72, which not only resolved the mystery of the identity of Nick Fury's archfoe Scorpio, but also resurrected Fury himself after he had seemingly been assassinated in the final issue of the original SHIELD series. Scorpio had been Fury's brother Jake, and Nick took over his costumed identity in order to bring the rest of his criminal organization out into the open. This was the first appearance of Zodiac whose dozen leaders costumed themselves after those twelve astrological signs.

The next two issues pitted the Avengers in a return match against the Sons of the Serpent, a legion of costumed racists surely inspired by the real-life Ku Klux Klan. In the course of this storyline the Black Panther, a new addition to the Avengers, revealed to the American public that he was a black man, although one might have thought his costumed alias had been a dead giveaway.

Issue #80 introduced Marvel's first Native American super hero, Red Wolf. In the extraordinary issue #82 Daredevil teamed with the Avengers when Zodiac's mercenary army succeeded in invading and capturing all of Manhattan. What is perhaps most amazing from the viewpoint of today's readers is that this epic adventure was completely and satisfactorily told in but a single issue; today it would probably be done over twenty issues in three months!

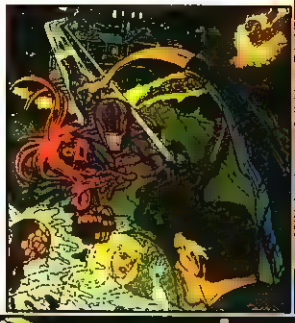
The final issue of 1970, #83, featured the first Marvel appearance of Brunnhilda the Valkyrie, as well as being Marvel's first story set at the Rutland, Vermont Halloween Parade, a legendary event for comics fans of that period, in which fans and the new generation of fans-turned-pros would ride on floats dressed as their favorite super heroes and super-villains.

BY PETER SANDERSON

October 1970 brought a true milestone in Marvel history: the first issue of CONAN THE BARBARIAN. This was a revolutionary step for Marvel. Although we now tend to think of Marvel as publishing primarily super hero comics, back in the 1960s and early 1970s the company was also doing other genres, like war books (SGT. FURY) and humor (NOT BRAND ECCH). Major artists like John Buscema and John Romita Sr. were drawing romance comics for Marvel simultaneously with their classic work on the super hero books. Still, CONAN represented a genre nearly unseen in comics up to that time.

Back in the 1930s a relatively obscure man of tremendous imagination named Robert E. Howard created a new genre of fiction now known as sword and sorcery, in which a brawny hero of a past era pits his courage and skill with weapons against eerie supernatural menaces. Before his death at an early age, Howard created many protagonists for the short stories he wrote for pulp magazines like "Weird Tales," the greatest of whom was Conan, a barbarian who lived in a time before recorded history, who roamed his world, combatting grotesque monsters, malevolent sorcerers, and cruel despots, finally making himself the king of the greatest nation of his day.

With the end of the pulp magazines, Howard and Conan had faded into obscurity. But in the 1960s Howard's Conan stories were reissued in a now legendary series of paperbacks, along with new stories by L. Sprague DeCamp and Lin Carter, filling in gaps in Conan's history. With a great deal of effort Roy Thomas persuaded Marvel to license the comics rights to the character; he would be the sole writer on the series for the next decade. During the series's initial years it was illustrated by Barry Smith, a new English artist who was as deeply influenced by the British fine art of the 19th and early 20th century as he was by the work of Jack Kirby. As a result Smith drew CONAN in a style the like of which comics readers had never seen before, wedding the character's savage power and the grotesquerie of his monstrous adversaries to a milieu of elegant, other worldly beauty.



If 1970 was a beginning for one classic Marvel series, it also spelled the end for another. Impossible as it may be for today's readers to believe, 1970 was the year that THE X-MEN was cancelled. For the past year the work of writer Roy Thomas, penciler Neal Adams, and inker Tom Palmer had made this a cutting edge comic, one of the very best being published. But apparently this burst of creative excellence came too late to prevent The Powers That Were from condemning the book.

As one might expect, THE X-MEN went out with a bang. Issue #64 introduced the Japanese mutant Sunfire, who was then bent on obliterating Washington, DC in retaliation for the wartime bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Issue #65 was a true landmark in X-MEN history; illustrated by Neal Adams and Tom Palmer and scripted by Denny O'Neil, it not only marked the official entry of Havok and Lorna Dane, the future Polaris, into the X-Men, but also resurrected Professor Xavier, who had been killed off many months before.

It was explained that Xavier had allowed the X-Men's former enemy, the shapechanging Changeling, to impersonate him, and that it was the Changeling, then, who had perished in preventing Grotesk from destroying the planet. The real Professor had been busy elsewhere preparing to combat a still greater menace.

And what could have been a greater threat than Grotesk's earthquake machine? It was an invasion by a race of aliens named the Z'nox. In extraordinary graphics Adams showed how the Professor psychically linked the minds of everyone on the planet to provide the monumental psionic force necessary to drive off the Z'nox.

After all that, the final issue, #65, came as something of an anticlimax, as the X-Men faced off against the Hulk in Las Vegas in the course of saving the life of the Professor, who had exerted himself nearly to the point of death in repelling the Z'nox.

And that was that.Over the next half-decade the X-Men would pop up as guest stars in various Marvel series, and the Beast would even get his own short-lived series in AMAZING ADVENTURES. But, as far as readers could tell, the X-Men were basically finished as stars of their own series. No one in 1970 could foresee the team returning with an almost entirely new line-up in 1975. And certainly no one would have ever dreamt that by the 1980s THE X-MEN would become Marvel's best-selling series.

Marvel Chronicles
1971

1971 was a strange year for Marvel Comics. The first phase of the "Marvel Age of Comics," the Silver Age, was rapidly drawing to an end, leaving many Marvel series in a creative slump. The new wave of writers and artists who had been fans of the Marvels of the 1960s had only just begun to arrive, one by one. Yet there were still books here and there that held the Marvel standard high.

It was in 1971, for example, that Marvel's new venture into sword and sorcery not only hit its stride but gathered considerable momentum.

The first full year of CONAN THE BARBARIAN by the team of writer Roy Thomas and artist Barry Windsor-Smith included their classic adaptation of Conan creator Robert E. Howard's eerie but moving "The Tower of the Elephant" in issue #4. CONAN's success gave rise to KULL THE CONQUEROR, another comics adaptation of Howard's work, as well as SAVAGE TALES, a magazine that was not bound by Comics Code restrictions on sex and violence and horror. SAVAGE TALES only had one issue in 1971 and would not have another for two more years, but that first issue was a milestone. Not only did it feature CONAN by Thomas and Windsor-Smith and Marvel's jungle hero Ka-Zar, but it also introduced the Man-Thing, a human being turned into a mindless swamp creature, by artist Gray Morrow and a new recruit to Marvel's writing ranks, Gerry Conway.

Stan Lee and John Romita Sr. were still working on THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, but while the stories they turned out in 1971 remained enjoyable, they did not break new ground creatively. Still, in the world of Marvel, what once seemed like forgotten details can years later take on major significance. So it was that AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #93-95 found Peter Parker following his girlfriend Gwen Stacy to London, where she was visiting her Uncle Arthur and Aunt Nancy for solace after the death of her father. Readers would see nothing more of Arthur Stacy until 1996, when he abruptly reappeared in the Spider-Books, belatedly starting his own investigation of his brother George's death.

Arguably the most important Marvel storyline of 1971 was the return of the Green Goblin in issues #96 through #398, written by Stan and drawn by Gil Kane. The revolutionary aspect of this story was the subplot. Stan Lee had been asked to do a cautionary story about the dangers of addictive drugs, but at that time the Comics Code Authority, to which Marvel subscribed, forbade all mention of drugs for any reason. Nevertheless, Lee and Marvel decided to go ahead with a subplot in which the Goblin's son Harry Osborn, distraught over his break-up with Mary Jane Watson—remember, back then, Peter was dating Gwen, not

1971 was a strange year for Marvel Comics.

MJ—had become addicted to some unidentified pills. In fact, at the story's end, it was the Goblin's horror at his son's condition that triggered his reversion to his Norman Osborn persona. AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #96 through #98 were published without the Comics Code seal of approval, and, to the Code Authority's credit, it soon revised the Code to permit drugs to be shown in comics so long as they were presented in a negative light.

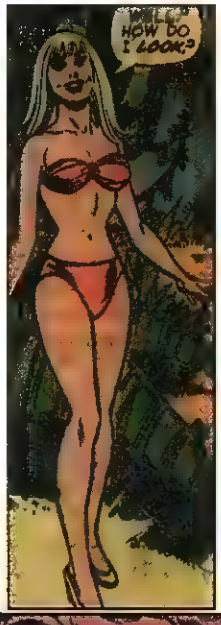
Readers surely expected something big would happen in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #100, but certainly nobody expected what actually happened!

Once again disillusioned with his role as Spider-Man, Peter Parker concocted a serum that he thought would remove his spider-powers. Instead, it backfired and made him more spider-like: it gave him four extra arms! Now he had eight limbs just as a spider did!

Having put Spider-Man in such a fix, Stan left it to Roy Thomas and Gil Kane to write and draw the next several issues and get Spidey out of it! Roy did just that, but in the course of doing so took the reader down yet another unexpected path. The Comics Code had also long forbidden the use of the elements of horror fiction in comics, but now this rule too was being relaxed. In another year Marvel would launch an entire line of horror comics, starting with the great TOMB OF DRACULA. But for now Thomas was testing the waters by introducing Michael Morbius in issue #101. Suffering from a blood disease, Morbius submitted himself to an experimental treatment that instead transformed himself into a "living vampire." He was not a supernatural creature like Dracula, but through scientific means had taken on vampire-like characteristics, including an uncontrollable lust for blood.

Seeking a way to rid himself of his extra arms, Spidey naturally turned to his old friend Curt Connors, the scientist whose experimental serum had turned him into the inhuman Lizard. (One notices a pattern here: scientists should not be guinea pigs for their own experiments!) With Spidey's characteristic bad luck he ended up battling both Morbius and the Lizard, but thankfully, Connors was able to use a sample of Morbius's blood to get rid of Spidey's new arms. And the whole story took only a short time so, no, Peter never had to explain to Aunt May why he suddenly needed shirts with a lot more sleeves.

Next Thomas and Kane sent Spidey off on one of his most unusual adventures to date. In an entertaining homage to "King Kong," Thomas had J. Jonah Jameson organize a Daily Bugle expedition to the prehistoric Savage Land, with Peter Parker as photographer and Gwen Stacy as a bikini-clad model. Once there Peter, as Spider-Man, of course encountered Ka-Zar, as well as his old enemy Kraven the Hunter, who had found and raised a gigantic alien monster, Gog, who, like Kong, soon menaced the hapless Gwen. But for the resolution of this tale, you'll have to wait until we get to 1972.



In contrast with its glory days of but a few years ago, FANTASTIC FOUR had a particularly disappointing year. Stan Lee and artists John Buscema and John Romita Sr. managed to rework an unfinished FF story drawn by Jack Kirby into a new adventure concerning a being called the Nega-Man in issues #107-109. But one could clearly see the FF was in trouble when in issues #110-113 the Thing went mad and turned against his teammates—for the third time! No doubt realizing the book needed a change, Stan Lee gave up writing FANTASTIC FOUR with issue #114 and Archie Goodwin took over with the next issue.

Lee and Buscema seemed little more inspired on THOR, where the Thunder God spent much of the year contending against a mysterious, seemingly all-powerful entity called Infinity. This proved not to be the benevolent cosmic deity introduced decades later in QUASAR, but instead was Odin's own evil side that had achieved a separate existence from him. In other words, Infinity was to Odin what over twenty years later Onslaught would be to Charles Xavier! Buscema remained on the THOR series throughout 1971, but Stan left with issue #192, ceding the role of writer to newcomer Gerry Conway, who was to start popping up practically everywhere at Marvel by year's end.

Despite the fact that three of Marvel's best handled CAPTAIN AMERICA during 1971—Stan Lee and pencilers Gene Colan and John Romita Sr.—the Star-Spangled Avenger's adventures that year were less than memorable. The most interesting development was that with issue #134 the book's title became CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON. This was a significant landmark in comics his-

tory: for many years thereafter this would be a series about a partnership between a white hero and an African-American one.

DAREDEVIL was in a considerable slump as 1971 began, but the year brought signs of welcome changes to come. With the January issue new Marvel recruit Gerry Conway became DAREDEVIL's new writer. It took a while for Conway to get a handle on the series, but he finally succeeded by introducing a major new element: the Black Widow.

When 1971 began the Widow was still starring in her own series in the "split book" AMAZING ADVENTURES, for which Conway wrote two installments. But the Widow was inevitably outshone by the extraordinary artwork Neal Adams created for the other series in AMAZING—THE INHUMANS. The latter series took over the whole book with issue #9, albeit

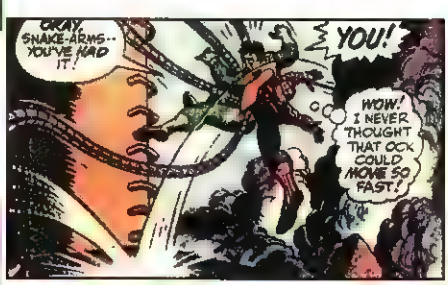
without Adams, and Conway shifted the Widow into the role of a supporting player in DAREDEVIL with issue #81. Over the following year she would become the Man Without Fear's lover, partner, and co-star.

Moreover, with issue #76 one of Marvel's greatest penciler-inker teams first took the artistic reins on DAREDEVIL as Tom Palmer joined longtime DD penciler Gene Colan on the series.

It seemed that there was no longer an audience for Marvel's "split books," or perhaps the characters chosen to star in them lacked sufficient commercial appeal. Barry Windsor-Smith continued to illustrate KA-ZAR in his elegant, otherworldly style in ASTONISHING TALES for three more issues, but the great Wally Wood left the book's DOCTOR DOOM strip with 1971's initial issue. What should have been an earth-shaking event for Marvel fans—the first clash between its two preeminent villains, Doctor Doom and the Red Skull—was disappointingly executed. Doom left ASTONISHING TALES with issue #8, and Ka-Zar took over the entire book with the next issue.

IRON MAN likewise endured a bad year—so bad, in fact, that his series was reduced to a bimonthly schedule by the end of 1971. There were only a handful of events of any long-lasting significance: the introductions of Tony Stark's psychic girlfriend Marianne Rodgers in issue #36, Kevin O'Brien's first appearance as the original armored Guardsman in #43, and the debut of one of Iron Man's most persistent adversaries, the original Spymaster, in issue #33. Oh yes, and by year's end this book, too, was one of the omnipresent Gerry Conway's assignments.

Roy Thomas crafted a superbly dramatic conclusion to his three-year run on SUB-MARINER, beginning with Namor's long overdue proposal to his beloved Lady Dorma in issue #33. (In that same issue, characteristically for Roy, he established Namora, the Sub-



Mariner's cousin from his Golden Age adventures, as part of modern Marvel continuity.)

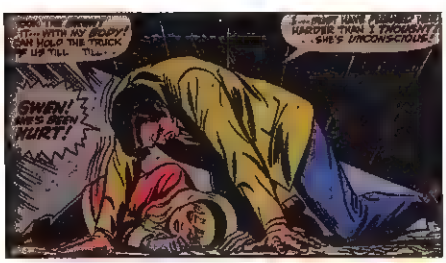
In the following two issues Roy and artist Sal Buscema created a new and very unlikely team: the "Titans Three," consisting of the Sub-Mariner, the Hulk, and the Silver Surfer! Oddly enough, the Titans proved to be the means for bringing Doctor Strange back into the Marvel Universe.

Strange had announced his retirement from practicing the mystic arts the previous year after he had lost his own series. Later in 1971 Marvel came out with a new book, MARVEL FEATURE #1. Not only did it contain a new solo DOCTOR STRANGE story, but its lead feature teamed Strange up with the Titans against the Omegatron, a doomsday machine created by Strange's deceased adversary, the alien scientist Yandroth.

Thus was born a brand new super hero team, the Defenders. The Surfer participated in this initial adventure, but would only turn up infrequently in the future history of the team.

Unlike most of the other Marvel super heroes, the Hulk had one of his best and most memorable years ever, thanks to Roy Thomas and Herb Trimpe, who wrote and drew most of that year's stories. It started with issue #135, a time travel story involving not only Kang the Conqueror but also Marvel's World War I aerial ace the Phantom Eagle, who had recently debuted in MARVEL SUPER-HEROES. Next, in issues #135 and #136 came Roy's science fiction reworking of "Moby Dick," as the Hulk was shanghaied onto a starship commanded by the obsessed Captain Cyber, who was bent on destroying an immense whale-like space monster called Klaatu.

The greatest Hulk tale of the year was plotted by renowned writer and comics enthusiast Harlan Ellison and scripted by Thomas. It actually began in AVENGERS #88, wherein an insect-like being called Psyklop captured and shrank the Hulk into seeming nothingness. In INCREDIBLE HULK #140 the Hulk found himself in a "subatomic universe" on a world called K'ai. There a trio of sorcerers cast a spell that enabled Bruce Banner's personality and intelligence to take command of the Hulk's mighty body. Accepted by the



race of green-skinned people who inhabited K'ai, the Hulk became their heroic champion and won the heart of the beautiful princess Jarella. It seemed as if the Hulk had found paradise after so many years of torment. Yet, just as he and Jarella were to be wed, Psyklop's gigantic hand reached down to retrieve his victim. The Hulk rapidly grew in size, leaving the microverse and the distraught Jarella behind, and returned to his own world, where the sorcerers' spell no longer applied. He reverted to the brutal, slow-witted Hulk he had been, once again pursued by his enemies, yet still dimly remembering the happiness that once had been his.

This remarkable tale would have been achievement enough for the Hulk in 1971, but there were more surprises in store. In issue #141 a rather bad-tempered, physically unprepossessing psychiatrist was transformed by gamma radiation into the superhumanly strong Doc Samson. In issue #142 the Enchantress made rich socialite Samantha Parrington into the new host body for the spirit of Brunnhilda the Valkyrie. And then in issues #143 and #144 there was the Hulk's first confrontation with Doctor Doom!

By any measure, though, the greatest achievement at Marvel in 1971 came in THE AVENGERS, where Roy Thomas would top everything he had done before. Early in 1971 in issues #85 and #86 he transported the Avengers to a parallel Earth where they and we first met the Squadron Supreme, a league of heroes who were reminiscent of other well-known costumed characters and who would in the 1980s win their own classic limited series.

But 1971's piece de resistance began in issue #89, with the start of Marvel's first true epic, the Kree-Skrull War, a universe-spanning conflict between the two great galactic empires that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby had created, with the fate of Earth in the balance. Sal and John Buscema both contributed artwork to this monumental serial, but it was when Neal Adams came onboard as penciler that readers must fully have realized how extraordinary this storyline was. The Kree-Skrull War was as important to Roy Thomas's work on THE AVENGERS as the Galactus trilogy was to Lee and Kirby's FANTASTIC FOUR. And what appeared in 1971 was merely a prologue to the Kree-Skrull War stories that would appear in 1972.

But perhaps some of you are wondering about the X-Men. Astonishingly, there were absolutely no new stories with the X-Men in all of 1971! Oh, sure, they still turned up in their own reprint book, but other recently cancelled characters, like Nick Fury, Captain Marvel and the Silver Surfer continued to appear in 1971 in guest roles, or, like Doctor Strange, in a new format like DEFENDERS. Apparently, the X-Men were viewed as being of such limited appeal there was no need to do new stories about them. The relative handful of X-MEN loyalists left in 1971 had to wait until 1972, when the Beast would become the first X-Man to reemerge into the comics marketplace.

-Peter Sanderson

1971

1972

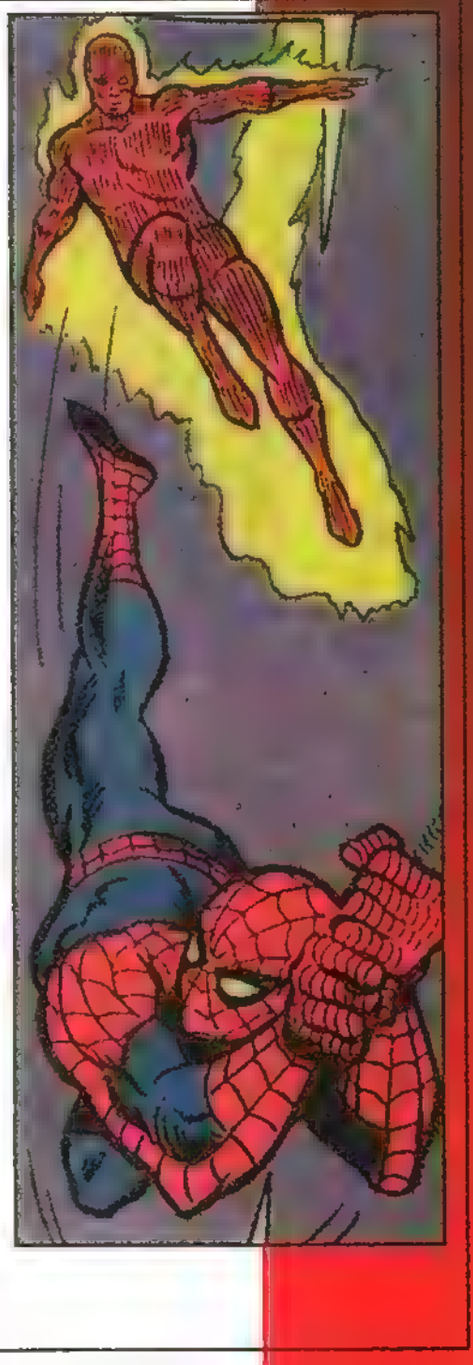
PART 1: THE SILVER AGE ENDS

Everyone agrees when the second great period of super hero comics, the Silver Age, begins: in the mid-1950s at DC and in 1961, with the premiere of FANTASTIC FOUR, at Marvel. But when did the Silver Age end? It is relatively easy to mark the end of the Golden Age of the 1940s, since most super hero comics had disappeared by the end of 1951. The Silver Age, however, was so successful that, despite a slump in comics sales in the late 1960s (comparable to the one we see today), most super hero comics kept on going.

The end of the Silver Age, I think, is marked not by the decline of a comics genre but by a passing of the torch from one generation to another. For that reason I believe that 1972 marks the transition from the Silver Age to the next period of Marvel's history, in which comics were written and increasingly drawn by the First Wave of talent who had grown up as fans of the Marvel comics of the 1960s and turned comics professionals.

1972, you see, is the year that Marvel founding father Stan Lee gave up writing comic books on a regular basis and turned over the role of editor in chief to his talented successor on so many of the series he had co-created, Roy Thomas. And so the end of the Silver Age now lies a full quarter-century in the past.

By 1972 Stan Lee was devoting increasing amounts of his time to the business end of comics as Marvel continued its rapid expansion. The only series he was still writing was THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, and even here, he had turned over the authorial reins for four issues to Roy Thomas. 1972 opened with the wrap-up to Thomas and artist Gil Kane's unusual but charming homage to "King Kong" which had taken Spider-Man to the prehistoric Savage Land. There Spidey and the jungle lord Ka-Zar rescued Peter Parker's bikini-clad girlfriend Gwen Stacy from the gigantic alien monster Gog, who was doing the bidding of the web-slinger's perennial enemy Kraven the Hunter.



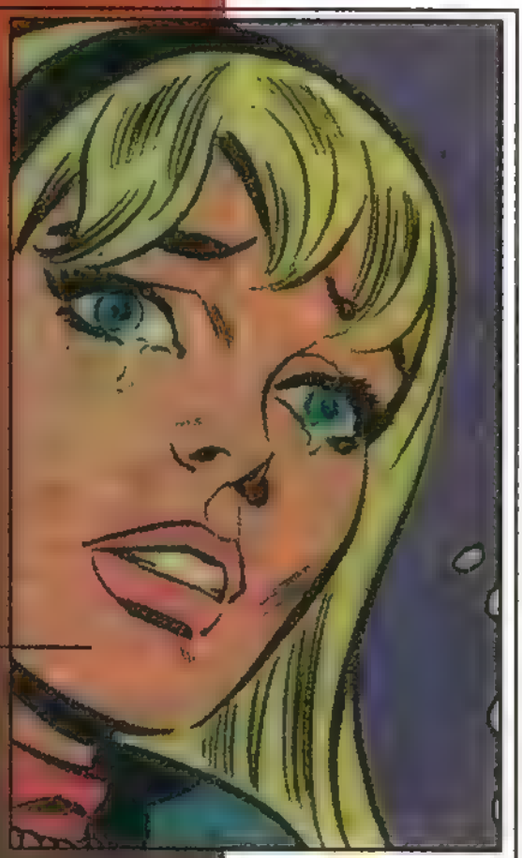
With issue #105 Stan Lee returned to the series with a three-parter featuring the now-mad scientist Spencer Smythe, original inventor of the Spider-Slayer robots. In issues #108 and #109 Lee and artist John Romita, Sr. spun a tale centering on Flash Thompson, Peter Parker's high school nemesis who had joined the army and been sent to Asia, where he met and fell in love with a young woman named Sha Shan. With its various Asian settings John Romita Sr. thinks of this storyline as his tribute to one of the greatest of all comic strips, Milton Caniff's TERRY AND THE PIRATES.

Of course since this story was published in 1972, Flash had been serving in the war in Vietnam and met Sha Shan there. But "Marvel time" is an odd fictional construct. Spider-Man has been around for thirty-five years, but Peter Parker will not turn fifty any time soon. Marvel's rule of thumb (as we will see in this year's "Flashback" annuals) is that it has only been roughly ten years since the events recorded in Lee and Kirby's FANTASTIC FOUR #1. So in current continuity Flash spent a brief time in the army and was stationed in Asia, but the Vietnam war was long over by the time he got there.

Doctor Strange guest starred in this SPIDER-MAN storyline, no doubt in large part to help publicize the return of his own series a few months later, as we shall see.

It would be nice to say that the last story in Stan Lee's decade-long run on SPIDER-MAN was one of the series' high points, but it was far from memorable. In issue #110 Spidey encountered an apparent mutant with an apelike build and superhuman agility—no, it's not the Beast—named the Gibbon. He was really not a villain at heart, but like the childlike monster Gog, he too fell under the bad influence of Kraven the Hunter. Lee left it to the new young writer Gerry Conway to finish up the Gibbon story in issue #111.

And so, with not a bang but a whimper, Stan Lee's classic run on THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, the comic book, came to an end. But he was far from finished with Marvel's flagship character. A mere five years later Lee and John Romita, Sr. would reunite to create THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN newspaper strip, and Stan is still writing it today, a full twenty years later! So, if you're keeping count, that means by now Stan Lee has written thirty years worth of SPIDER-MAN stories!



Conway went on in issue #113 to do his own first SPIDER-MAN storyline, embroiling the wall-crawler in a gang war between his archenemy Doctor Octopus and a new crimelord, Hammerhead. This new character had suffered amnesia as a result of a head injury, and another Conway creation, the criminal surgeon Dr. Jonas Harrow, had implanted a steel plate in his head: hence Hammerhead's new name. Inspired by a movie poster he had seen upon waking after his injury, Hammerhead styled his new identity after Prohibition-era gangsters.

1972 also saw the debut of Spider-Man's first commercially successful spinoff series, MARVEL TEAM-UP. The book's gimmick was teaming up two of Marvel's large and growing stable of super heroes. Spider-Man and the Human Torch, who had memorably joined forces in past Marvel stories, jointly starred in the initial three issues. After that Spider-Man teamed up with various other heroes. After a while, in the book's early years, every two issues of TEAM-UP starring Spider-Man would be followed by an issue in which the Torch paired up with another character. But ultimately, every issue of MARVEL TEAM-UP featured Spider-Man and a guest star; it had become Spider-Man's second monthly title, and would inspire the present day revival of the concept, SPIDER-MAN TEAM-UP.

The first several issues of TEAM-UP contain some surprises. An unnamed African-American woman who briefly appears in the first issue will in later years turn out to be Iron Fist's ally and girlfriend, detective Misty Knight.

Issue #4 represents Marvel's unsuccessful attempt at relaunching the X-Men, who, incredibly enough from today's point of view, had proved a commercial failure and had their series cancelled two years before! For some reason it was decided to see if the X-Men would prove more popular if they went into action dressed in everyday clothing instead of costumes. True it is that people who look down on super hero comics as juvenile reading material can't bring themselves to accept the idea of fictional crimefighters in skin-tight spandex. And every so often someone tries to do a super hero book without costumes: in the 1980s Marvel even launched the entire New Universe line of comics about just such mundanely dressed superhumans. And these efforts don't work. Putting on a mask or costume that symbolizes taking on a powerful new identity seems to be an essential part of the super hero concept. When the X-Men next

A NEW GENERATION ARRIVES

Some people who grew up reading the Marvel Comics of the 1960s are of the opinion that the 1970s was a barren time creatively for Marvel. On the other hand, many of you may have noticed that the current generation of Marvel editors and writers seem bent on reviving as many 1970s creations as possible, from the Micronauts to Howard the Duck.

There is a good degree of truth in the position of each side in this debate. It was and remains difficult for anyone to match the heights achieved on Marvel's classic series by Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and the other top creators of the 1960s. During the 1970s a number of Marvel's leading titles did indeed fall into a creative slump. Some of them featured perfectly decent stories, but ones which fell short of being either memorable or innovative.

But nevertheless the first half of the 1970s marked the second great creative ferment of "the Marvel Age of Comics," often most visible in the company's second and third tier titles. This was for two reasons.

One was that Marvel's commercial success, a change in its distribution arrangements, and alterations in the Comics Code made it possible for Marvel greatly to expand the number of titles it published and to move into new story genres, notably horror.

The other reason was that the 1970s witnessed a phenomenon unseen in the previous history of comic books. In the past writers and artists often worked on comic books as a necessary alternative to earn a living while they were trying to get work in what were then better paying and more respectable fields, like drawing newspaper comic strips or writing pulp novels. But the comics of the Silver Age of the 1960s, especially Marvel's, inspired a generation of comics fans who grew up reading them to want to write and draw comic books professionally. Roy Thomas, Archie Goodwin, and Jim Steranko, who created many of the memorable Marvel stories of the 1960s, were the point men for this new wave of creators; they, however, had begun as fans of the comics of the Golden Age of the 1940s and the classic EC comics of the 1950s. On succeeding Stan Lee as Marvel editor in chief, Roy Thomas brought in numerous new young comics professionals whose imaginations had been fired by the Marvel revolution.

One of these was writer Steve Englehart, who not only succeeded Thomas on THE AVENGERS in 1972, but also took over CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON with issue #153. Thomas came up with an idea for Englehart's first storyline that very much reflected Roy's own interests as a comics aficionado.

Interestingly, the Silver Age began at both Marvel and DC with a repudiation of past Golden Age continuity. In the story that introduced Barry Allen, the Silver Age Flash, at DC, the Golden Age Flash was referred to as merely a fictional character in comics Barry read. Similarly, when Johnny Storm became the Human Torch in FANTASTIC FOUR #1, there was no mention in the story that there had ever been an earlier Human Torch in Marvel's fictional reality. Very soon thereafter, though, Marvel began referring back to its past heritage, reintroducing the Sub-Mariner in FF #4. But when Lee and Kirby brought back Captain America in AVENGERS #4, they established that he had gone into suspended animation near the end of World War II, thereby discarding from continuity all the CAPTAIN AMERICA stories published over the following decade!

As time passed both DC and Marvel would seek to integrate more of the Golden Age stories into the Silver Age continuity. Barry Allen

eventually met the Golden Age Flash. Roy Thomas had Steve Englehart reincorporate the CAPTAIN AMERICA stories of the 1950s into the Marvel timeline.

Englehart and artist Sal Buscema introduced an evil version of Captain America and his partner Bucky who turned out to be the Cap and Bucky of the 1950s. This Cap had rediscovered the "super-soldier formula" and given it to himself and the new Bucky, who fought Communist agents on behalf of the United States. But, not having been exposed to the necessary "vita-rays," they were driven insane by the formula and became ruthlessly fanatical, hunting down even innocents as Communist traitors. Eventually the government placed them in suspended animation, until a disgruntled government man released them decades later.

In pitting the idealistic original Cap against his Red-hunting imitator, Englehart was also making a political statement. The Marvel Comics of the 1960s reflected the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. But it was now the early 1970s, when much of the baby boomer generation was rebelling against their elders' politics and demanding an end to the Vietnam war. It seemed appropriate to the times that Captain America, by fighting and defeating the fanatical 1950s Cap, was also distancing himself from the excesses of Cold War opposition to Communism.

VICLES #14

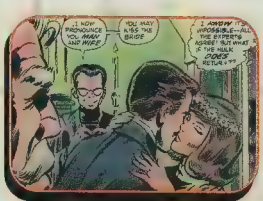
1972

IRON MAN was in severe decline during this period. Need I say more than that 1972 was the year that introduced the mysterious Black Lama, who would eventually be revealed to be an otherdimensional double of President Gerald Ford? But here too, the change in the political landscape was in evidence. Iron Man faced a new nemesis, Firebrand, a costumed terrorist who represented the excesses of the other extreme, the radical left of the early 1970s.

Over in THE INCREDIBLE HULK, the green-skinned monster was finally captured and put on trial in a story that drew explicit parallels with the then-infamous trial of the Chicago Seven, a group of leftists. Like one of them, Bobby Seale, the Hulk was held bound and gagged in the courtroom.

This was also the year that Betty Ross, tiring of her seemingly doomed relationship with Bruce Banner, instead married one of his and the Hulk's most implacable nemeses, Major Glenn Talbot, in issue #158.

For the most part, though, little that was memorable happened in either IRON MAN or HULK in 1972. They were caught in the malaise that affected many series that year. Even Stan Lee seemed to have lost his way in his brief and final return to scripting the FANTASTIC FOUR, bringing Galactus to Earth yet again. Yet having the world-devourer tear up the roller coaster at Coney Island in issue 122 seemed quite a comedown from the grandeur of Galactus's previous appearances.



Late that year Roy Thomas moved over from the second-level team book, THE AVENGERS, to the flagship team title, FANTASTIC FOUR, and again gave new twists to longstanding continuity. In the early 1960s, before they completely understood they were creating a united fictional cosmos, Lee and Kirby had created three different subterranean civilizations and tyrannical rulers for each. Stan had already pitted two of the tyrants, the Mole Man and Tyrannus, against each other in HULK, and now Roy brought the third, Queen Kala of the Netherworld from TALES OF SUSPENSE, into their endless war in FF #127-128.

In the following issue Roy filled the missing slot in the villainous Frightful Four, long since vacated by Medusa, with a new character, Thundra, the first Marvel female character to

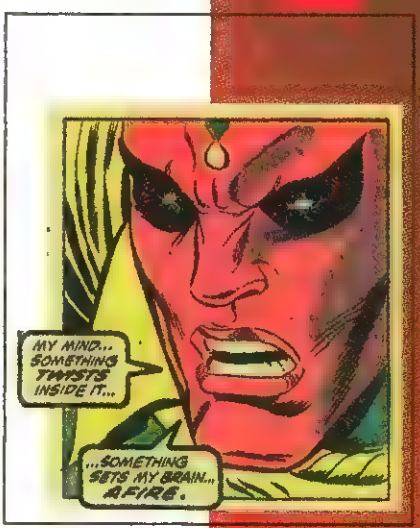
appeared as guest-stars in Marvel stories, their costumes would be back as well.

It may seem odd at first, but I also believe another landmark signifying the end of Marvel's Silver Age is Roy Thomas's departure from THE AVENGERS in 1972. I think of Thomas as a major transitional figure in Marvel history. Roy, of course, was Stan Lee's successor as writer of THE AVENGERS, but he brought it to heights not even Lee and Kirby together had achieved consistently on the series. I think of work on THE AVENGERS and THE X-MEN as among the great achievements of Marvel's Silver Age. He was just as prolific a writer when his terms on both these series ended, but he also took over as editor in chief, bringing in other new people who, like himself, had been fans of 1960s Marvels and had been inspired by them to advance the super hero genre and the comics medium further.

1972

Thomas's supreme opus on THE AVENGERS was the astonishing Kree-Skrull War storyline, which culminated in the spectacular first two issues of 1972. In its unforgettable climax the Supreme Intelligence, the cyborg entity that ruled the alien Kree race, revealed that both the Kree and their eternal foes, the Skrulls, had reached dead ends in their evolution. It was humanity, whom both races despised yet secretly feared, who held the potential to reach a kind of godhood. And so, the Supreme Intelligence took Rick Jones, the young everyman who had played a role in HULK, AVENGERS, and CAPTAIN MARVEL, and briefly unleashed his latent potential. Thus Jones, singlehandedly, brought the Kree-Skrull War to a halt by mentally immobilizing the warring armies.

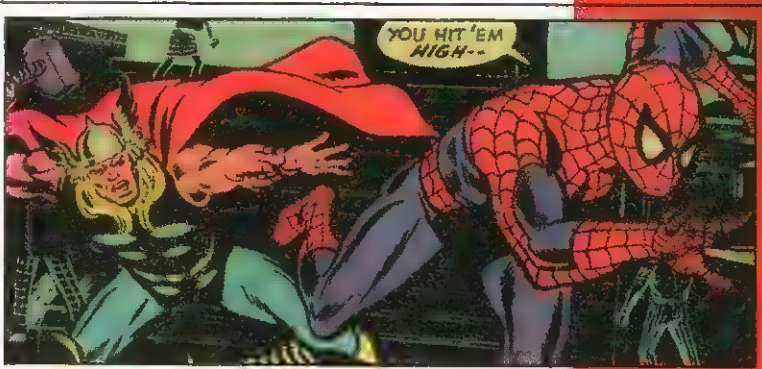
Characteristically for Thomas, who was also dedicated fan of the comics of the 1940s, he had Rick Jones create mental simalcrums of many of Marvel's Golden Age heroes. There were the familiar figures of Captain America, the original Human Torch, and the Sub-Mariner, of course. But there were also doppelgangers of other Golden Age characters whom Thomas and others would revive in succeeding decades: the original Angel, the original Blazing Skull, the Patriot, and the original, otherdimensional version of the Vision.



With issue #98 CONAN artist Barry Windsor-Smith joined Thomas to craft a three-issue storyline in which Hawkeye, who had gained the size-changing powers of Goliath, returned to his archer identity. This culminated in the stunning hundredth issue, in which everyone who had ever been an Avenger—even the two traitors, the Hulk and the Swordsman—reunited to invade Olympus, home of the Greek gods, and rescue their fellow member Hercules from his enemy, the war god Ares.

Issue #s101 was based on story ideas by the celebrated author and comics aficionado Harlan Ellison, who had plotted the *Avengers-Hulk* crossover that introduced Jarella the previous year. This time a seemingly ordinary man named Leonard Tippit warned the Avengers of "Five Dooms to Save Tomorrow" only to learn at the story's end that it was he who was the true menace, who unwittingly possessed the power to destroy the planet.

Next came a three-parter in which the mutant-hunting robots, the Sentinels, returned to Earth to launch their new plan to rid the planet of mutants by sterilizing all of humanity so no new mutants could ever be born! In the course of the story Larry Trask, the son of the Sentinels' inventor, perished, and the Avenger Quicksilver mysteriously

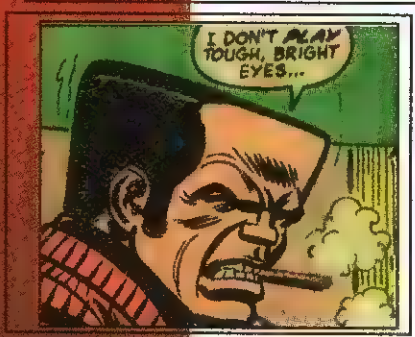


disappeared; the latter's fate would be revealed in issues to come.

Moreover, the Avengers' former ally, Wonder Man, who they believed had died years before, turned up, still seemingly dead but his body strangely still in perfect condition, in the hands of his criminal brother, the Grim Reaper.

What truly made AVENGERS #102-104 a harbinger of Marvel's future was the fact that Roy Thomas plotted the story with the help of a new Marvel staffer who had already that year collaborated with writer Archie Goodwin on INCREDIBLE HULK #148. His name was Chris Claremont, and in three more years he would be assigned the now bookless X-Men, and a new era in Marvel's history would begin.

Issue #104 was Roy Thomas's last on THE AVENGERS, although he would return to the team as writer of AVENGERS WEST COAST in the 1990s. As of issue 105 the reins passed to Steve Englehart, who, on this series and others, would prove himself one of Marvel's finest writers of the 1970s.



In retrospect, another sign of the end of the Silver Age was the return of the great Golden Age artist Bill Everett for his last run on his 1939 creation, SUB-MARINER.

Before Everett's arrival there had been another turning point in the Sub-Mariner's life, as he finally located his aged human father, Captain Leonard McKenzie, who had become a forgotten near-derelict living in Boston, who, perhaps by coincidence, now resembled the longhaired amnesiac Sub-Mariner whom the Human Torch had found back in FANTASTIC FOUR #4. McKenzie was taken prisoner by Namor's enemies Llyra and Tiger Shark, and finally the old captain was cruelly slain by Tiger Shark and died in his son's arms.

Next Namor found himself allied with his enemy Doctor Doom as the Latverian monarch sought to steal the all-powerful Cosmic Cube from Modok, ruler of the subversive cabal A.I.M.. This underrated story by Gerry Conway and artist Gene Colan had its affecting moments. We discovered towards the end that Doom's main reason for seeking the Cube was not as a means of power but as a way of healing his horribly scarred face. and at the end Doom had not only come to respect and value Namor, but even had come to regard him as a friend.

With issue #50 Everett arrived as plotter and artist, collaborating turn of the great Golden Age artist Bill Everett for his last run on his 1939 creation, SUB-MARINER. with new scripter Mike Friedrich. Old-time comics fans were surely pleased to see Everett bring back Namor's leading lady from the 1940s, Betty Dean, now the middle-aged Mrs. Prentiss. Moreover, Everett also revived Namor's Golden Age nemesis Byrrah, drawing him once more in the style he used in the 1940s, enormous black eyes and all.

But Everett was not only interested in resurrecting the past but in making contributions to the future. And so in issue #50 he introduced the Sub-Mariner's high-spirited young cousin, Namorita, who turned out to be the daughter of Namora, another of Everett's Golden Age cast of characters. Everett's Namorita was feisty but endearingly cute, only recently turned a teenager; she had not yet become the more mature adventurer familiar in the 1990s as a member of the New Warriors. Looking at Everett's original drawings of her, it's hard to believe that young Namorita, who has since become the blue-skinned Kymaera, celebrates her twenty-fifth anniversary this year.

In our next installment we shall return to 1972 to see how Marvel's new guard launched the company in brand new directions.

—Peter Sanderson

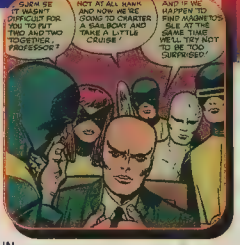
THE HUMANS HAVE TAKEN FROM ME EVERYTHING I HELD MOST DEAR..! BECAUSE OF THEM MY PEOPLE HAVE DESERTED ME ...ONLY YOU, A HANDFUL OF LOYAL FOLLOWERS, REMAIN..!!

boast superhuman strength and a bodybuilder's physique as her principal assets. Keep in mind that before this Marvel's female characters tended to have less physical super-powers, like turning invisible or casting "hexes." Times were indeed changing.

Further proof of growing feminist sentiment is the renaming of DAREDEVIL as DAREDEVIL AND THE BLACK WIDOW with issue #92. The Widow and Daredevil were now both lovers and crimefighting partners, and in the latter role acted more as equals than a similar earlier team, Henry Pym (alias Ant-Man and Giant-Man) and the Wasp had. Giant-Man and the Wasp as a team were imbalanced as to each member's level of power, and the Wasp seemed less serious about crime-fighting than Pym did. Hence, the DD-Widow team represented something new. (There was, by the way, a short-lived attempt to revive the ANT-MAN series in 1972 in IRON MAN and then in MARVEL FEATURE.)

Equally innovative was the fact that with issue #87 writer Gerry Conway moved DD and the Widow to San Francisco, making this the first Marvel series set in a major American city other than New York. It was a great idea, but not for Daredevil, whose roots, as Frank Miller would later demonstrate, lay in his boyhood in Manhattan's Hell's Kitchen. Other Marvel series in subsequent years, from CHAMPIONS to IRON MAN to AVENGERS WEST COAST, would follow Daredevil to California (as would various Marvel writers and artists, even including Stan Lee himself). But these experiments never work for long: either the series comes to an end, or, as in Daredevil's case, the character moves back East. The Marvel editorial offices remain in New York

#14 1979 CHRONOLOGY


SURE! SEE IT WASN'T DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO PUT TWO AND TWO TOGETHER, PROFESSOR?
NOT AT ALL HANK AND NOW WE'RE GOING TO CHARTER A SAILBOAT AND TAKE A LITTLE CRUISE!
AND IF WE HAPPEN TO FIND MAGNETOS SLE AT THE SAME TIME WE'LL TRY NOT TO BE TOO SURPRISED!

(and, even today, more Marvel writers and artists live in or near New York City than any other city), and it has always been essential to the Marvel Universe that its characters interact. No major Marvel super hero series can long resist the gravitational pull exerted by these two factors. Inevitably, the Marvel super heroes remain a New York phenomenon.

Conway increasingly moved DAREDEVIL in the direction of science fiction, which ultimately proved a dead end for the series. He was also the writer of THOR in 1972, which continued to feature the artwork of John Buscema. But 1972 was an undistinguished year for THOR, although Conway did introduce three mortals whom Odin arranged to have transformed into superhuman beings. They were the first of the "Young Gods," who would play a significant role years later in THOR's landmark 300th issue.

Over the past few years some prominent Marvel characters had been launched into books of their own, which quickly collapsed. Now Marvel tested the market again and relaunched CAPTAIN MARVEL with issue #22. Surprisingly, the first three new issues were drawn by Wayne Boring, the classic Superman artist of the late 40s and 1950s (and, incidentally, the uncle of future Marvel editor Ralph Macchio). With issue #23 a new writer came on board the series: Marv Wolfman, another of Marvel's leading writers of the 1970s.

Doctor Strange returned to the attack on two fronts. He had alreadyreappeared at the end of 1971 in MARVEL FEATURE #1 as the leader of a new, loosely organized "non-team," the Defenders, which also included the Hulk and Sub-Mariner. The Defenders spent two more issues in this try-out book before graduating to their own comic, written and drawn by the CAPTAIN AMERICA team of Steve Englehart and Sal Buscema. They re-introduced Barbara Norriss, a young cult member from the pages of HULK, who would take on a new identity the following year.

Other new series fell into one of three categories. First, there were the attempts, all short-lived, to reach out to a female audience with series starring women protagonists and done in part by female writers and artists. There was the super hero series, THE CLAWS OF THE CAT, whose heroine is today known as Tigra, by Linda Fite and Marie Severin. SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL, like its inspiration, the comic book *Sheena, Queen*

of the Jungle, featured a white woman who becomes a scantily-clad female version of Tarzan. Shanna would go on to marry Marvel's jungle hero Ka-Zar and today appears in his new series. (In 1972 Ka-Zar himself still held court in ASTONISHING TALES.) And then there was NIGHT NURSE, but the market for comics versions of soap opera-style material had by now virtually vanished.

With CONAN having proved a great success, Marvel licensed the comics rights to another great hero of the pulp magazines of the 1930s, Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze. With his nearly superhuman skills and fantastic adventures, Doc was clearly one of the forebears of the comic book super heroes; for example, his Empire State Building headquarters foreshadows the Fantastic Four's Baxter Building base. Doc now seems to come off as a period piece, however, and none of his comic book incarnations have proved particularly successful.

Most importantly, with the new revisions of the Comics Code permitting horror tales in the "classic" tradition, Marvel quickly began creating a whole family of horror comics. The flagship title, and the one that would run the longest, was TOMB OF DRACULA, which wove Bram Stoker's great character into Marvel-style tales of adventure. Gerry Conway and Gene Colan crafted the first issue, in which the aptly named Clifton Graves pulls the stake from Dracula's skeletal remains, restoring him to life. The vampire lord then encounters Graves' associate, Dracula's own descendant, the American Frank Drake. With issue three Archie Goodwin made major contributions to the series, setting it firmly in London and introducing Rachel Van Helsing, the descendant of Dracula's archenemy from the novel, Professor Van Helsing. Frank and Rachel would team up as vampire hunters, and their pursuit of Dracula would provide the narrative spine for this long-running series.

Meanwhile, the Man-Thing, introduced in SAVAGE TALES, took up residence in the Marvel series FEAR. Still

MARVEL VIGILES

another Marvel try-out book, MARVEL SPOTLIGHT, presented the debuts of two more new Marvel horror characters. First, in issue #2, came Jack Russell, who became the "Werewolf by Night," inspired by the 1950s B-movie "I Was a Teenage Werewolf." When the Werewolf won his own book later that year, he was succeeded in SPOTLIGHT by Johnny Blaze, the original Ghost Rider. Stunt motorcyclist Blaze made a deal with "the devil" (years later to be revealed as the Silver Surfer's foe Mephisto) to save the life of his foster father. But the price was that Blaze would now transform into a strange skeletal creature whose body seemed to be aflame. Created by writer Gary Friedrich, the Ghost Rider drew his visual appearance in part from Marvel's Golden Age hero the Blazing Skull. Both the initial WEREWOLF BY NIGHT and GHOST RIDER stories boasted artwork by the great Mike Ploog, a specialist in horror.

And, of course, most of you are wondering, "What about the X-Men?" Well, in AMAZING ADVENTURES #11 Henry McCoy, a. k. a. the Beast, left Xavier's school to take a research job at a think tank called the Brand Corporation. Rather foolishly, he imbibed a mutagenic formula he created, which changed him from a normal-looking person (apart from his big hands and feet) into an animal-like creature with fangs and pointed ears and covered with gray fur. By the end of 1972 his fur had changed in color to blue-black, and Hank McCoy had become the Beast we know today. Drawn by Tom Sutton and written first by Gerry Conway and then by Steve Englehart, the BEAST series in AMAZING ADVENTURES did not last long. But the Beast, in his new form, would graduate into membership in the Avengers in years to come.

THE GREATEST HUMAN MASS OF PEDAL DEXTERITY IS SUPER LOCOMOTION — SPEED, THAT IS!
HEH, TOO, IT'S MODERATELY USEFUL TO BE ABLE TO BOUND OVER BOULDERS AND BOUNCE OFF BUILDINGS — LIKE A RED-BLOODED RABBITOH!
OF COURSE, PERFECTING SUCH FANCY FOOTWORK REQUIRED ARDUOUS PERIODS OF PAINFUL PRACTICE IN PROFESSOR XAVIER'S DANGER ROOM!

Although the X-Men's own series had died, the transformation of the Beast marked the first successful step in revamping the X-Men for a new generation of readers. Within the next two years that process would culminate in the creation of the "new" X-MEN series that is still Marvel's best seller today.

—Peter Sanderson

1973

PART 1: THE SILVER AGE ENDS

Anyone interested in the world of comics might think of it as a place where, in contrast with the real world, stability reigns. The great comics characters live on, eternally youthful, for decades even as their fans age from childhood into adulthood. The readers of Marvel's "Silver Age" comics of the 1960s saw the Marvel revolution's greatest architects, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and even Stan Lee himself, moved on to other projects, but the characters they had created went on, entrusted to a new generation of writers and artists. The more things changed, the more things stayed the same.

1973 proved them wrong. It provided the proof that the Silver Age was dead, that a new generation was in charge of Marvel, a new decade was well underway, and comics were heading in a new, darker direction. Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross's MARVELS pinpointed the event that took place in the Marvel of 1973 spelling the end of an age of innocence in super hero comics. Photojournalist Phil Sheldon, the all-too-human protagonist of that revolutionary book, realized to his shock, 1973 was the year that Gwen Stacy died.

It happened in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #121 in a story by writer Gerry Conway and artist Gil Kane. Norman Osborn had once more reverted to his insane alternate personality of the original Green Goblin, who also knew Spider-Man's true identity. As the Goblin he captured Parker's girlfriend, Gwen, and took her to the top of one of New York City's most famous bridges. (Exactly which bridge it was is a matter of dispute. Conway's text refers to it as the George Washington Bridge, but Kane clearly drew the Brooklyn Bridge. Since comics is a visual medium, I prefer to go with the Brooklyn Bridge, but confusion has persisted as to which bridge it was throughout three decades of flashbacks to Gwen's death.)

Before the arriving Spider-Man's eyes, the Goblin pushed Gwen off the bridge. Swinging down, Spider-Man caught Gwen with his webbing—to the accompaniment of a loud snapping sound. He found her dead.

And here is another point of dispute. Yes, clearly, the Green Goblin bore the responsibility for Gwen's death, and Conway's script states that it was "the shock of the fall" that killed Gwen. But, as Phil Sheldon's reaction in MARVELS hints, it is also possible to believe that the snapping sound was not made by the webbing as it caught Gwen. What if the sudden shock of her fall being stopped broke her neck? What if Spider-Man had unintentionally caused her death?

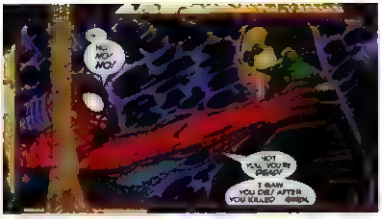
In any event, Spider-Man was torn by anguish and guilt, having lost the first woman he truly loved. He blamed himself for failing to save her and even for putting her in danger in the first place, since the Goblin killed her to get revenge on him.

Even today, thankfully, Spider-Man abides by the moral code of the heroes of the Silver Age. Issue #121 ends with his vowing vengeance on the Goblin, and, indeed, in the next issue Spider-Man defeats him in furious combat. But Spider Man will not take the Goblin's life. That job is seemingly left to fate: the Goblin's glider, damaged in the battle, impales him, leaving him apparently dead.

As far as readers were concerned for over twenty years thereafter, the original Goblin was dead. There also seemed to be an unspoken rule in comics back then that the killer of a major character must die (usually through accident) and stay dead, not to be revived by subsequent writers. Hence, Baron Heinrich Zemo (who killed Captain America's partner Bucky) and the Burglar who murdered Peter Parker's Uncle Ben have never been resurrected (or, in the Baron's case, not permanently!)

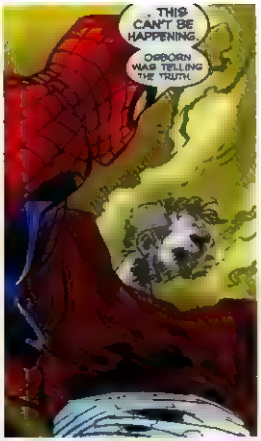
Instead, Conway immediately began setting up a new Green Goblin. Peter Parker's friend and roommate, Harry Osborn, the Goblin's son, had already been established as a victim of drug addiction. Readers soon learned that Norman Osborn's body had been stripped of the Green Goblin costume before the police found it. Inevitably, both the police and J. Jonah Jameson suspected Spider-Man of killing Osborn. Eventually, readers would find out that it was Harry who stole the costume, and Harry, crazed by drugs and grief, would become the new Green Goblin to take revenge on Spider-Man.

Harry is now dead, and only last year, seeking a major villain to blame for the entire Spider-Clone scenario, the Spider-Man editors decided to resurrect the original Green Goblin. What saved his life was a super-power no one had heard of until Wolverine came along: the notorious "fast healing" ability. It



was decided by writers after the original Goblin's death that the chemical formula that had driven him mad had also endowed him with superhuman strength; in 1996 it was also decided the formula enabled him to recover from even seemingly mortal injury. And so Norman had woken up in the morgue, and even today, bears a nasty scar on his chest. (What, hasn't he heard of plastic surgery?)

The death of Gwen had other far-ranging repercussions. Conway later revealed that Peter Parker's biology teacher, Professor Miles Warren (a character actually created by Lee and Ditko), had been obsessed with Gwen and blamed Spider-Man for her death. Warren would go on to plague Spider-Man in his costumed identity of the Jackal and create the notorious Spider-Man clone, Ben Reilly, who returned two decades later and proclaimed himself the real Spider-Man until his demise last year [PETER PARKER: SPIDER-MAN #75.—Tim]



Most significantly, Gwen's demise cleared the way for a more prominent role for Mary Jane Watson, then the series' secondary female lead, in Peter Parker's life.

When they finally brought Mary Jane on stage, Stan Lee and John Romita Sr. had played with the idea of making her Peter's girlfriend, but they ultimately paired him with Gwen, who had evolved into a conventional young lead ingenue, beautiful, loving, more demure than the aggressively sexy Mary Jane, and free from any character flaws. Mary Jane, however appealing as a free spirit, was portrayed as somewhat flighty, unthinkingly toying with the affections of the emotionally unstable Harry.

But when Peter returned to his apartment after Gwen's demise, he found Mary Jane waiting for him. This was significant: slowly over the rest of the first of his terms as Spider-Man writer, Conway nudged Peter and Mary Jane towards a romance.

I'LL TELL YOU WHY, PARKER. I HATE YOU BECAUSE YOU'RE YOUNG. I HATE YOU BECAUSE YOU WERE LOVED BY GWEN STACY.
AND I HATE YOU-- BECAUSE YOU LET HER DIE!

This first effort to bring Peter and Mary Jane together did not last. There would be a long period in the 1980s when Mary Jane was absent from the series, and when she returned she was not intended to be a serious romantic interest for Peter. Years later Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz showed how her party girl personality was merely the facade through which she tried to compensate for her unhappy life with her family. DeFalco and Frenz merely wanted to turn Mary Jane into Peter's confidante, but by giving her a more fully developed personality, they made it possible for her to become the series' leading lady and ultimately Peter's wife.

Gwen was an idealized girlfriend, but Mary Jane proved over time to have a more complicated and intriguing personality, and one that, as Conway showed in his 1980s graphic novel PARALLEL LIVES, resembled Peter's own. Perhaps that is why Gwen remained the unattainable dream, but Mary Jane became the woman Peter actually ended up marrying.

Perhaps the most important result of Gwen's death, though, was to mark a change in the attitude of Marvel stories. In part Gwen's death was in the Marvel tradition that Stan Lee had established. Other important supporting characters had already died in Silver Age stories: Junior Juniper in SGT. FURY, and even Gwen's own father. This was not even the first Marvel leading lady to perish: there had been Nick Fury's wartime love, Lady Pamela Hawley, and even the Sub-Mariner's longtime paramour Lady Dorma.

But this was different. This was the girlfriend of Marvel's leading solo star. Her death was Marvel's equivalent of killing off Lois Lane. Such a thing was not supposed to happen in super hero stories: no matter how often the girlfriend was endangered, the hero always rescued her. But now the happy ending was no longer guaranteed. The

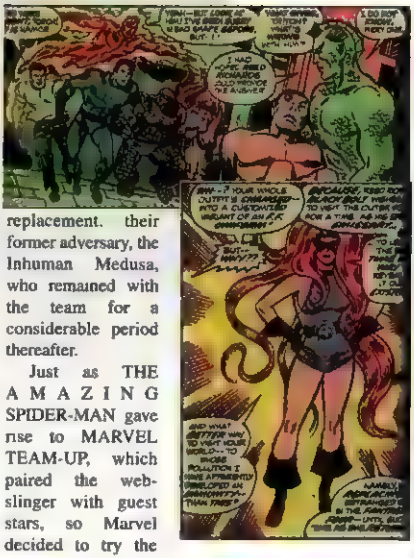
tone of Marvel's stories—and super hero stories in general, no matter what company published them—did not change radically overnight, but the genre had started on its path to a darker and more dangerous world.

Marvel continued its exploration of the horror genre in *Amazing Spider-Man* #124, when J. Jonah Jameson's son John, then still an astronaut, discovered a strange gem on the moon. The Moongem affixed itself to his neck and under a full moon transformed him into the creature dubbed the Man-Wolf. Just as Morbius had been turned into a vampire-like being by scientific means, so too the Man-Wolf was not a true supernatural werewolf, like Marvel's Werewolf by Night. At present John is free of his transformations into the Man-Wolf, but they were to haunt him for many years to come.

And then, in issue #126, came the perpetrators of horror of a different kind. Their names were Carter and Lombardo, and they were the creators of something that fills readers from the Seventies with horror to this day. If you started reading comics after that, and do not wish to be exposed to the knowledge of this nightmare, then skip the next paragraph.

Carter and Lombardo created the Spider-Mobile. By now Marvel had gotten so popular it was making merchandising deals, and apparently somebody thought, hey, Batman's got the Batmobile, so why couldn't Spider-Man have a Spider-Mobile that we could turn into a toy? And so the Spider-Mobile was introduced into the comic book. To Marvel's credit, though, it was partly treated as a source of humor, since Spider-Man didn't know how to drive. See, he grew up in New York, where there's plenty of public transportation and so much traffic most people don't bother with a car. Mind you, some readers wrote in to ask how come Spidey couldn't drive a car when Stan had Peter Parker driving a motorcycle. Hmm. The short answer is that Marvel had royally screwed up. Eventually, Marvel's writers got fed up with the Spider-Mobile and wrecked it, but, oh, did we have to suffer in the meantime. [For more on the Spider-Mobile see VISION #1.—Historian Tim.]

The status quo received a temporary but resounding shake-up from Roy Thomas over in THE FANTASTIC FOUR. Marital tensions led Susan Richards not only to leave her husband Reed, but also to quit the Fantastic Four. Two issues later the remaining Fantastic Three found an unexpected

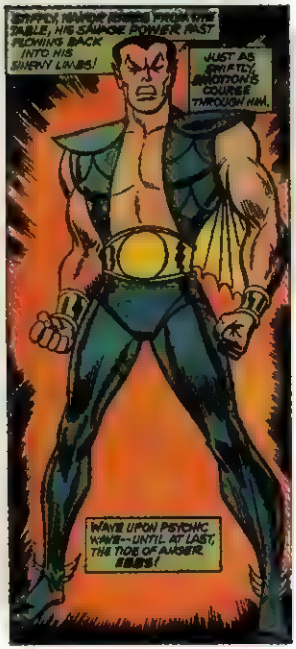


replacement. their former adversary, the Inhuman Medusa, who remained with the team for a considerable period thereafter.

Just as THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN gave rise to MARVEL TEAM-UP, which paired the web-slinger with guest stars, so Marvel decided to try the same tactic with the Thing. They tried out the format

with MARVEL FEATURE Vol. 2 #1, in which another new Marvel writer, Len Wein, partnered Ben Grimm with his frequent sparring partner, the Hulk, against the unlikely team of the Hulk's archenemy, the Leader, and Kurrgo, Master of Planet X. Who, you ask? Well, Kurrgo was the alien villain in FANTASTIC FOUR #7, and readers were quickly learning that the new wave of writers even would bring back characters Lee and Kirby had created but had never wanted to use again! No one has bothered with bringing back Kurrgo since MARVEL FEATURE, but the Thing team-ups proved successful enough to begin appearing the following

YOU AND ME BOTH, STEVE. I'M SO TEMPTED I COULD PUNCH SOMETHING.
THEN LET'S MAKE MY BUGGY'S STILL GOT WHEELS...
DON'T GET VIOLENT, LEN. TOM FAGAN'S EXPECTING US.
ARDW


SWIFTLY, NAMOR RISES FROM THE TABLE, HIS SAVAGE POWER MIST FLOWING BACK INTO HIS SINEWY LIMBS!
JUST AS SWIFTLY, EMOTION'S COURSE THROUGH HIM.
WAVE UPON PSYCHIC WAVE—UNTIL AT LAST, THE TIDE OF ANGER EBBS!

year in their own series, MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE.

Thor spent most of the year battling aliens in his series, but the January issue, number #207, which would actually have gone on sale several months earlier, marks the very first —and unofficial—Marvel-DC crossover! Back in the early 1970s there was an annual Halloween parade held in the small town of Rutland, Vermont, which was notable for the number of comics fans who showed up dressed as super heroes and super- villains. Keep in mind that these were the days before comics specialty shops or widespread comics conventions, so a fan event like this was something unusual A number of the new young comics professionals headed out to Rutland at Halloween, and Roy Thomas introduced the parade, Rutland's leading comics fan Tom Fagan, and himself as a spectator into the Marvel Universe in AVENGERS #83 in 1970.

THOR #207 found three young writers attending the parade while the thunder god did battle with Loki elsewhere in Rutland. One of the writers was Gerry Conway, author of the Thor story. The second was Steve Englehart, who wrote the trio into AMAZING ADVENTURES #16, which found the Beast fighting the Juggernaut that same night in Rutland. And the third writer was Len Wein, who put the authorial trio into a tale set that same night in Rutland—over in JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #103! What's more, if you read all three issues, it all fit together as one story!

1973 witnessed yet another sign of generational change, as Golden Age artist Bill Everett did his final issue of the book starring his own 1939 creation, SUB-MARINER #63. The most memorable of his issues that year, however, was number #57, in which Namor encountered an Everett creation from the 1950s, his version of the goddess Venus, who, like Marvel's Thor, could assume mortal form at will.

Yet another new Marvel recruit, Steve Gerber, had been scripting Everett's SUB-MARINER issues that year, and he stayed on as writer afterwards. But the book's sales were falling, and in an effort to make Namor look more like a conventional super hero, Marvel outfitted him in a black costume designed by John Romita Sr. The rationale in the story was that Namor had lost his ability to breathe air, and his former foe Reed Richards had created a costume enabling him to do so.

It is too bad more people were not reading SUB-MARINER, because they were also missing its memorable new backup series, "Tales of Atlantis." It was a chronicle of the final days of Atlantis up to and including the Great Cataclysm that sank it beneath the waves. It was, in effect, a sword and sorcery series, with science fiction substituting for magic, centering on the warrior king Kamuu and his equally brave and formidable swordswoman wife Zartra. The series was also a sign of things to come, since it was a collaboration of Gerber with another new talent, artist Howard Chaykin.

In this chapter of the Marvel Chronicles, I have concentrated on the more conventional Marvel series of 1973. In the Spider-Man and Sub-Mariner of 1973 we see signposts marking the passing of the last traces of the Golden and Silver Ages. In our next chapter we will turn our attention to the fireworks being set off elsewhere in the Marvel Universe by a new breed of comics writer: Steve Englehart's AVENGERS, Marv Wolfman's TOMB OF DRACULA, Steve Gerber's MAN-THING, and so many more.

—Peter Sanderson

1973

PART 2: THE EXPANDING UNIVERSE

In 1973 DAREDEVIL reached its one hundredth issue. It was the last of the original "Marvel Age" super hero titles to premiere, back in 1964; its anniversary testified that Marvel was here to stay. In celebration of this issue, Daredevil's new young writer Steve Gerber featured an unexpected guest star: Jann Wenner, publisher of *Rolling Stone*! In its early days *Rolling Stone* had showcased the Marvel revolution in comics in a cover story, and now Marvel was, in a sense, returning the favor. *Rolling Stone*'s coverage demonstrated how Marvel's books had won an audience quite different than the super hero comics fans of the past. Marvel's readers were older and more sophisticated; its audience overlapped with that of the new forms of rock music *Rolling Stone* celebrated.

Now, in the 1970s, writers and artists who had grown up not only with the Marvel comics of the Silver Age but also the many cultural changes of the 1960s, started using heroic adventure comics to express their own views on what it meant to be a hero in contemporary society.

One of the most important of this new breed of the 1970s was writer Steve Englehart, who seemed ubiquitous in 1973. Overflowing with new ideas, Englehart energized every series he touched that year, and he was only just warming up for what he would accomplish in years to come!

For example in CAPTAIN AMERICA, Englehart began the year with a radical if ultimately wrongheaded experiment. Captain America was poisoned by his new foe, the original Viper (not to be confused with his female successor), but instead of killing him it endowed him with superhuman strength! Presumably this was intended to make Cap seem more exciting to readers used to the super-powered heroes of other Marvel comics. But, like most experiments with characters that violated their essential concept, this did not last for long; in fact, so quickly was it forgotten that it is hard to pinpoint just when Cap's strength returned to normal! The point of Captain America is that he represents the peak of perfection that anyone can achieve. He is not someone set apart from the rest of humanity by superhuman powers; Cap is the idealized Everyman, or, rather, Everyamerican.

In issues #161 and #162 Englehart reintroduced the "Mademoiselle" from the French Resistance whom Cap had loved and lost in World War II, as recounted by Lee and Kirby in TALES OF SUSPENSE #75. She proved to be Peggy Carter, the much older sister of Cap's then current girlfriend Sharon. Ironically, thanks to spending years in suspended animation, Cap was closer to Sharon's age now than to Peggy's.

But perhaps it was Englehart's final CAPTAIN AMERICA issue that year that would have the most important effect on Marvel history. It was in issue #168 that he introduced the original Phoenix—no, not Jean Grey or any cosmic entity impersonating her. The first Marvel character to take the name "Phoenix" was actually Helmut Zemo, the son and heir to Baron Heinrich Zemo, the Nazi scientist and war criminal responsible for the death of Captain America's wartime sidekick Bucky. Heinrich had inadvertently brought about his own demise years ago in his final confrontation with the Captain. But Helmut blamed the Captain and sought revenge, only to tumble into a vat of one of his father's chemicals. The exposed flesh of his face was left a ruin, and from then on, Helmut wore a mask like his father's and proudly bore the name of Baron Zemo.

Englehart was particularly interested in the unlikely pairing of the Vision and the beautiful Scarlet Witch. Although on first glance the android Vision appeared emotionless, Englehart showed him falling deeply in love with the Scarlet Witch. In issue #113 of the AVENGERS, the world learned of their relationship, leading to a suicide attack by bigots carrying explosives. Aptly dubbing themselves the Living Bombs, these fanatics were infuriated by the idea of a human woman loving a "machine." Englehart had devised a new variation on Marvel's perennial theme of prejudice against those who are different.

In the previous issue, Englehart brought in another couple who contrasted sharply with the Vision and Witch and would further complicate their lives. When Stan Lee had introduced him years before, the Swordsman was a costumed criminal who joined the Avengers only to betray them to his master, the Mandarin. Inspired by their heroism, he sought to switch allegiances, but he was too late; circumstances conspired against him, and he fled, doomed to the life of an outlaw. Subsequent stories ignored the pathos of the Swordsman's fate and presented him as an unrepentant villain.

SURE, SHE'S A MUTANT -- BUT SHE'S STILL A PERSON... AND IF HE SHOULD GO ON TO MARRY HER...
...IT WOULD LEGITIMIZE FOREVER THE RIGHTS OF AN ANDROID IN OUR SOCIETY--
-- THE RIGHTS OF A HUMAN!

Englehart, though, went back to the character's original treatment, and showed with surprising realism for that period how the Swordsman's life of crime led him to degradation and alcoholism. He was saved by a bargirl named Mantis, one of Englehart's most memorable creations. Englehart made her Vietnamese in acknowledgment of the impact the war in that Asian country had on the America of the early 1970s. Mantis was also an unusual character for that time in that she was a female martial artist many years before Frank Miller would create Elektra. Martial arts would show up again later in the year. This genre of hero was probably inspired by the successful films of Bruce Lee at the time.

Mantis and the Swordsman became lovers, and she helped him regain his sobriety and much—but, significantly, not all—of his self-confidence, and persuaded him to seek redemption through rejoining the Avengers. Understandably wary, the Avengers nevertheless gave him a second chance, and allowed Mantis to become a provisional member as well. The Swordsman's self-doubt and his need to prove himself made him a very different kind of Avenger than the usual self-assured super heroes. And Mantis, whose personal agenda remained mysterious, was the wild card in this group. She emerged as a troublemaker, trying to take the unwilling Vision away from the Scarlet Witch, heedless of the agony it would cause not only the Witch but the Swordsman, who was dependent on her.

Englehart also turned his skill for characterization to his other new super hero team assignment, THE DEFENDERS. In past issues of THE AVENGERS and HULK, Thor's enemy the Enchantress had infused a human woman with the persona of a Valkyrie from Asgard or had assumed the role herself. Also in HULK, readers had met Barbara Norriss, a member of a mystical cult who became trapped in another dimension. In DEFENDERS #4 the soul of Brunnhilda the Valkyrie took possession of Barbara, endowing her with Asgardian powers. Thus the Defenders gained a new member, a goddess attempting to fit into a human world.

While developing his cast of characters, Englehart simultaneously succeeded in crafting epic-scale adventures for his super heroes. His first great success was the Avengers-Defenders War, which ran concurrently in AVENGERS #115-118 and DEFENDERS #9-10. No previous crossover between Marvel series had run for so many issues or so many months. Strangely enough, it picked up from the Rutland Halloween trilogy, as Loki [see last issue—Tim], left blinded at its denouement, encountered Doctor Strange's archenemy, the dread Dormammu, and the two evil sorcerers set out to reassemble the Evil Eye, a mystical weapon introduced by Lee and Kirby in FANTASTIC FOUR #54. Their schemes pitted the Avengers against the Defenders in one-on-one battles ranging all over the world, until finally, both sides joined together as a virtual army of super heroes to take on their real enemies, Loki and Dormammu, in the climactic conflict.

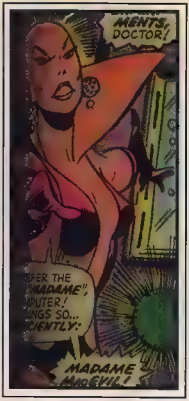
Once the heroes remained triumphant, several Defenders traveled back to the time of the Crusades. It was this story that established how the soul of Dane Whitman, the present day Black Knight, had gone back in time and inhabited the body of his ancestor, Eobar Garrington, the Black Knight of the Crusades.

Over in THE INCREDIBLE HULK, Englehart chronicled the heroic demise of the X-Men's former adversary and then member, the Mimic, in issue #161, although this was yet another Marvel death destined to be reversed many years later. Bruce Banner's future wife Betty underwent the strangest experience of her life in issue #168, when the grotesque Modok used gamma radiation to transform her into a savage green creature that was half woman and half bird, the Harpy.

In my opinion, Englehart's greatest work at Marvel was on Doctor Strange. It was in 1973 that he and artist Frank Brunner first teamed up on Strange's new tryout stories in MARVEL PREMIERE, introducing us to the grotesque Shuma-Gorath, a monster inspired by the works of H. P. Lovecraft. Here they were merely bringing an already ongoing storyline to a strikingly dramatic end; in 1974 Englehart and Brunner would

dazzle readers with their own new story concepts.

IRON MAN would have had one of the least memorable years in its history in 1973 save for the landmark events in issues #54 and #55. It was in these issues that Marvel readers were introduced to a new mythos of characters created by another new arrival at the company, writer-artist Jim Starlin. First, in issue #54, came the mysterious bald woman then known by the arch name of Madame MacEvil, but who would soon be renamed Moondragon, and ISAAC, the sentient computer based on Jupiter's moon Titan. The following issue introduced us to Mentor, the ruler of Titan; Drax the Destroyer, a superhuman warrior obsessed with killing Titan's greatest enemy; and that enemy himself, the evil god Thanos.



Thanos and Starlin both immediately moved over to CAPTAIN MARVEL, where the death-obsessed Titan unleashed the Cosmic Cube against both Mar-Vell and the Avengers. This would be merely the first of many epic adventures Starlin would craft around Thanos from 1973 into the 1990s.

What is most remarkable about Marvel in 1973, though, is the way that it vastly expanded its publishing output not by creating new super hero books but by moving aggressively into new forms of adventure stories. The company's venture into sword and sorcery, for example, had already won considerable success.

In early 1973 artist Barry Windsor-Smith took his leave of CONAN THE BARBARIAN after an astonishing three year run. Roy Thomas and Windsor-Smith ended their collaboration on the series with the introduction of Conan's female counterpart, the barbarian swordswoman Red Sonja, who debuted in issues #23 and #24. Thomas created the character by combining aspects from two female characters from stories Conan's creator, Robert E. Howard, had written outside his Conan mythos. Windsor-Smith was succeeded on the book by John Buscema, who would remain Marvel's principal Conan artist for well over a decade to come.

Probably due to CONAN's success Marvel experimented with revivals of other classic characters. Lester Dent's creation Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze, was one of the best-selling characters in the pulp magazines of the 1930s and was clearly a forebear of the comic book super heroes who followed. But somehow neither this nor any other attempt since to do Doc Savage in comics form has proved commercially successful.

Marvel had considerably more success, though, in reviving Sax Rohmer's great though decidedly politically incorrect villain, Fu Manchu, who had already inspired Marvel's Mandarin and Yellow Claw. The key here was transferring the Rohmer characters into a new genre, martial arts adventure, which had recently begun to win popularity in America through the films of the late Bruce Lee. Hence, Steve Englehart—him again!—and Jim Starlin created Shang-Chi, the "Master of Kung Fu," who debuted late in 1973 in SPECIAL MARVEL EDITION #15. Shang-Chi was the teenage son of Fu Manchu who sent him to assassinate his enemy, Dr. Petrie, another of Rohmer's characters. Shang-Chi did so—or so he thought: Petrie later turned up alive—but then encountered Rohmer's hero, the now elderly Sir Denis Nayland Smith, who opened the boy's eyes to Fu Manchu's evil. Shang-Chi, whose name appropriately meant "the rising and advancing of a spirit," then rebelled against his father and sought redemption through aiding Smith in thwarting Fu Manchu's schemes. Within another year, SPECIAL MARVEL EDITION would be renamed MASTER OF KUNG FU, and would go on to earn a reputation as one of the most sophisticated and well-crafted comics series of the 1970s.

Marvel used a true classic of science fiction as a background against which to transpose the idea of a Conan-like figure into the post-apocalyptic future. In WAR OF THE WORLDS, premiering in AMAZING ADVENTURES #18, co-creators Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway, and Neal Adams devised an alternate future in which H. G. Wells's Martians returned and conquered the Earth in 2001 AD. Less than two decades later, a band of freedom fighters arose under the leadership of the heroic Killraven. Before the year was out, WAR OF THE WORLDS was turned over to the new writer who would make the series a cult favorite, Don McGregor.

Continuing to experiment with other forms of adventure, Marvel introduced HERO FOR HIRE, starring Luke Cage. Luke was actually a man named Lucas who had been framed for a murder and sent to Seagate Prison. There he volunteered to be the subject of an experiment by the kindly Dr. Noah Burstein which endowed him with superhuman strength and bulletproof skin. Escaping from Seagate he made his way to New York City, adopted

the alias "Luke Cage," and started a one-man business. Whereas past super heroes put their lives on the line for free, because fighting crime was the "Right Thing to Do," Luke was instead a "hero for hire."

HERO FOR HIRE attempted to portray a different side of New York than previous Marvel comics had: not only the inner city, but the seamier side of the metropolis.

Marvel's biggest area of expansion was its new horror line. WEREWOLF BY NIGHT continued, and GHOST RIDER graduated from MARVEL SPOTLIGHT to his own series, and was succeeded in SPOTLIGHT by SON OF SATAN, starring the half-man, half-demon Daimon Hellstorm. One of Marvel's peaks in 1973 was artist Mike Ploog's retelling of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* novel in the new MONSTER OF FRANKENSTEIN series. Marvel even moved into new formats with its new black and white magazine line of horror comics, including DRACULA LIVES, VAMPIRE TALES featuring Morbius and Satana, and TALES OF THE ZOMBIE

Two books stood out above all of Marvel's many horror titles. One was TOMB OF DRACULA, which yet another new Marvel arrival, Marv Wolfman, began writing with issue #7. In that same issue Wolfman introduced Quincy Harker, the son of two characters from Bram Stoker's original novel. Now elderly and confined to a wheelchair, Harker nonetheless continued his life's work of battling Dracula. Harker became the nucleus of a team, including the previously introduced vampire hunters Frank Drake and Rachel Van Helsing, who remained at the heart of the series throughout its run.

Marv Wolfman and artists Gene Colan and Tom Palmer formed one of the finest creative teams in Marvel' history, endowing TOMB OF DRACULA with rich and affecting characterizations and a dark vision of life, unusual for the comics of that time, in which heroic victories were far from assured and death and suffering were omnipresent.

Only three issues after coming aboard the series, Wolfman introduced Blade, the African-American vampire hunter wielding wooden daggers, in issue #10. The final issue of that year, #15, was the first of Wolfman's "Dracula's Diary" issues: collections of vignettes from the vampire lord's past, as described by the Count himself. For Wolfman's foremost achievement was in transforming Dracula himself from a cardboard figure of melodrama into a multidimensional character, indeed, the most complex of any of the cast members.

The other great horror series of the 1970s was MAN-THING in FEAR, now written by Steve Gerber. Even in his first year on the strip, Gerber demonstrated his astonishing range: he could take the series from a character study of everyday people who had found their way into Man-Thing's swamp to surreal encounters with beings from other dimensions. Within this first year readers were introduced to Jennifer Kale, the teenage girl who discovered her talent for magic; her eccentric mentor, the ancient wizard Dakimh the Enchanter; their Conan-like ally from another world, Korrek; and their demonic nemesis Thog the Nether-Spawn. Gerber indulged in political commentary through his villainous businessman F. A. Schist (get it?) and even parodied Superman through Wundarr, an alien today known as the Aquarian. Gerber's ideas reached fever pitch in his final issue of the year, #19, drawn by Val Mayerik, in which beings from other dimensions poured through the "Nexus of All Realities" in the swamp—including a talking, cigar-smoking duck named Howard! But we shall deal more with Howard and Gerber in our next installment.

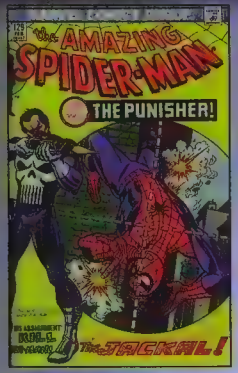
And what of the X-Men, you contemporary readers ask? Still regarded as commercial failures, Marvel's mutants were restricted in 1973 to guest appearances along with their archenemy Magneto in AVENGERS #110-111. Rather, all but one of the original X-Men appeared there; the Angel had mysteriously disappeared, and in the coming year Steve Englehart would solve the mystery in a remarkable storyline in CAPTAIN AMERICA. But still, in 1973, the year that Gwen Stacy's death ended one era of Marvel history, no one could yet foresee that only two years later, one of Marvel's commercial failures would begin a new era when they were reborn in GIANT-SIZE X-MEN

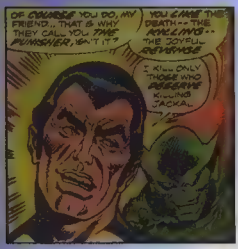
—PETER SANDERSON

1974 PART 1

A New Breed of Hero

In 1974 Marvel was unquestionably on the cutting edge of action-adventure comics. But the problem with pushing the envelope is that sometimes the innovators find themselves moving too far in front of the audience, which takes a while to catch up to them.




OF COURSE YOU DO, MY FRIEND... THAT IS WHY THEY CALL YOU THE PUNISHER, ISN'T IT?
YOU CAME THE DEATH -- THE ANGEL WHO -- THE JOYFUL AVENGER
I KILL ONLY THOSE WHO DESERVE KILLING JACKAL

Take, for instance, the GHOST RIDER series that debuted in 1972 but did not become one of Marvel's most popular series until the early 1990s. So too in 1974 two characters were created who began as supporting characters with an edge that made them intriguingly different from the super heroes the readership already knew. Both would have to wait for a decade for the rise of a new generation of readers with decidedly different tastes who would make them both stars.

The first of them was the Punisher, who was introduced in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #129 in a tale written by Gerry Conway and drawn by Ross Andru; it was John Romita, Sr., however, who designed the character's appearance, complete with his now familiar skull costume. With the Punisher, Conway successfully translated the vigilante figure familiar from popular culture sources like *The Executioner* novels into the world of costumed heroes. From his initial appearance, most of the Punisher's character was firmly in place, such as his vision of himself conducting a one-man war against crime.

The one thing strikingly different about the Punisher in his initial appearance is the fact that he is manipulated by an unlikely villain scampering about in a garish green costume. No, this is not the Green Goblin, but his successor as the premier criminal mastermind in Spider-Man's world, the Jackal, who convinced the Punisher that Spider-Man was a criminal who had to be killed.

By the end of the story Spider-Man has exposed the Jackal as the true villain to the Punisher, and the two former enemies found themselves uneasily on the same side. That uneasiness marks a major change in Marvel stories, however. Up until then, heroes in Marvel super hero comics did not kill under any circumstances. Indeed, when the Black Widow even threatened to kill the villain in AVENGERS #37 back in 1967, she was regarded as stepping over the moral line. It had become something of a cliche in comics that an infuriated hero would finally catch up with an archenemy, intent on killing him, and then stop himself at the last moment from doing so, saying that to kill his adversary would make him no better than his enemy was. Even Marvel's Western heroes like Kid Colt and the Rawhide Kid would shoot guns out of the hands of their foes rather than kill them.

Standards had changed considerably when Marvel began publishing CONAN THE BARBARIAN: the Cimmerian never thought twice about slaying his opponents or even of hiring himself out as a mercenary soldier.

The Punisher was bent on acting as judge and jury and killing as many criminals as he could. Spider-Man certainly did not agree with the Punisher's ruthless attitude, but, significantly, he was willing in this story, and in many future ones, to team up with the Punisher against mutual enemies. For example, the Punisher soon returned in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #134 and 135, in which he and Spider-Man joined forces against the original Tarantula. From the

very start, then, Marvel treated the Punisher not as a villain, but as an antihero; stories did not wholeheartedly approve of his methods, but the reader and Spider-Man often found themselves siding with him.

If, as Kurt Busiek and Alex Ross's MARVELS points out, the death of Gwen Stacy (in an earlier story also, significantly, written by Conway) marked the Marvel Universe's loss of innocence, then the introduction of the Punisher as a morally ambiguous hero marked the next major step in the darkening of this fictional world.

For the rest of the 1970s, with exceptions, the Punisher would primarily remain a guest star in the Spider-Man books. In the early 1980s Frank Miller would draw a moral line in DAREDEVIL and brand the Punisher as one of the bad guys. By the end of that decade the Punisher would not only be restored to his role as anti-hero, but would become the star of his own series.

Even in his first appearance, readers might have guessed that the Punisher would eventually star in stories of his own. But what did the first readers of INCREDIBLE HULK #180 think of the character who popped up on the final page? He was short; in fact, he looked like a runt, hardly at all in the mold of the powerfully built super heroes readers already knew. His costume, bright yellow with tiger stripes and tiny black horns, looked rather ugly in its initial appearance. And what kind of super-power was this? Claws? Surely most readers thought that this new character was destined to remain obscure. But this bad-tempered new Canadian hero, Weapon X a.k.a. Wolverine, would in another year be set on the path that would make him one of Marvel's most popular characters.

Roy Thomas, then Marvel's editor-in-chief, was already planning a revival of one of the first super hero series he wrote, The X-Men. His idea was to create a new team of mutants who came from different countries. He suggested to writer Len Wein that he create a Canadian mutant and call him Wolverine, after the vicious little mammal native to Canada and the northern United States. Following the wolverine image, Wein devised this feisty, short fighter; there probably hadn't been such a short super hero since the Golden Age Atom at DC.

Wein's master stroke was equipping Wolverine with his claws, made of adamantium, the unbreakable metal that Thomas had introduced in THE AVENGERS. It was just as surprising back then to see a hero using what were in effect bladed weapons as it was to see the Punisher toting guns. Although it would be years before it was even hinted that Wolverine killed his opponents with his claws, nonetheless it was strange to see a super hero using what were clearly potentially lethal weapons. Again, perhaps swordsman heroes like Conan and Killraven had prepared the way for Wolverine. In any event, the claws clearly gave Wolverine a dangerous edge other characters of the early 1970s lacked.

SAID ALARM TO CONN A CLOSE SPREADS LIKE WILD-FIRE... BUT SOON DOES THE UNWIND SIDE OF HISTORY WHOSE HAND DIRECTS THIS PUZZLE SEQUENCE OF THE EVERYONE AND THE TERMINATING—
THE GREATEST ASSEMBLAGE OF SUPER-HEROES SINCE THE AVENGERS DISBANDED CLASH IS DETERMINED TO FIND OUT!

The two-parter in INCREDIBLE HULK #180-181, written by Len Wein, drawn by Herb Trimpe and inked by the late Jack Abel, was not really even about Wolverine. The Hulk found himself in Canada, where he encountered a super-strong monster called the Wendigo. This creature was actually a human being named Paul Cartier, who, lost in the snowy wilderness, was forced to eat human flesh from a corpse to survive. (The Marvel Universe was certainly getting darker fast! I'm still surprised this got past the Comics Code!) This sin brought on a supernatural curse which transformed Cartier into the savage, mindless Wendigo, a variation on the sasquatches of legend. Cartier's sister Marie and his friend Georges Baptiste, who was deeply and unrequitedly in love with her, had traveled into the wild to perform a spell that could cure the Wendigo.

Meanwhile, the Canadian government sent Wolverine in to deal with these two monsters. Even then Wolverine's claws were described as made of unbreakable adamantium, making them tough enough to pierce even the Hulk's hide. Though Wolverine was identified as a mutant, there was no mention of his fast healing factor. And it would not be for a few more years that it would be clearly established that Wolverine's claws were part of him and not part of his costume.

After fighting each other to no avail, the Hulk and Wolverine joined forces against the Wendigo, but the matter was finally resolved when Baptiste, pathetically devoted to making Marie happy,

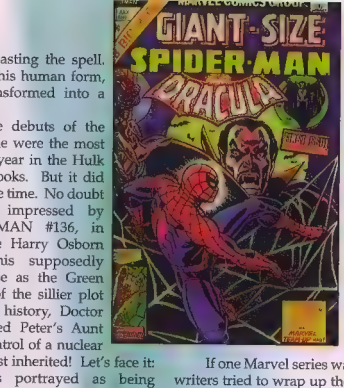
sacrificed himself in casting the spell. Paul Cartier regained his human form, but Baptiste was transformed into a Wendigo in his place.

In retrospect, the debuts of the Punisher and Wolverine were the most important events that year in the Hulk and the Spider-Man books. But it did not seem that way at the time. No doubt readers were more impressed by AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #136, in which the now-insane Harry Osborn first appeared in his supposedly deceased father's guise as the Green Goblin. And in one of the sillier plot twists in Spider-Man history, Doctor Octopus nearly married Peter's Aunt May in order to get control of a nuclear power plant she had just inherited! Let's face it: May was sometimes portrayed as being downright stupid back then. She was dressed in a wedding gown about to go through her vows with Doc Ock when Spidey interrupted the ceremony in the nick of time. The nuclear plant was soon afterwards destroyed in an explosion. But the question remains: who the heck is this unknown deceased relative of Peter's who originally owned the plant? Don't expect anyone to ever solve this mystery; it's best left forgotten.

Similarly, MARVEL TEAM-UP featured another of Marvel's all-time silliest stories. [Which was highlighted in VISION #3. -Tim] In issue #28 Spider-Man teamed up with Hercules against the mysterious City Stealers, who towed Manhattan out to sea. So at the climax of the story Hercules tows the entire island back! Now, Herc is strong, but this is ridiculous! Wiser heads at Marvel later declared MARVEL TEAM-UP # 28 as no more than a tall tale Herc told while he was drunk!

That year TEAM-UP also introduced another long-running foe of Spider-Man, as scientist Dr. Vincent Stegron used DNA from dinosaurs from the Savage Land to mutate himself into the reptilian Stegron the Dinosaur Man in issue #19.

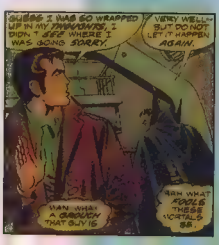
Marvel was continuing to expand its output, adding a third Spider-Man title: a quarterly 48-page comic that was actually a larger version of MARVEL TEAM-UP, pairing the web-slinger with other Marvel stars. (As you can see, the traditional idea that Spider-Man was a loner was by now taking a considerable beating.) Originally known as GIANT-SIZE SUPER-HEROES, the book started over again with issue #1 the following month as



GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN, with an unusual story in which Spider-Man co-starred with Dracula, but the two never actually met. The rationale was that it was believed that too closely mixing Dracula's world of classic horror and Spider-Man's world of science-fictional super heroes would undercut the tone of both.

If one Marvel series was abruptly cancelled, writers tried to wrap up the storyline in another series. Hence, after THE POWER OF. . .WARLOCK suddenly bit the dust in 1973, the Hulk journeyed to Counter-Earth, a duplicate of Earth then positioned on the opposite side of the sun, in issue #176. Over that issue and the next two the Hulk bore witness to the end of Adam Warlock's mission as Counter-Earth's Messiah, as, inevitably, his satanic nemesis, the Man-Beast, had this godlike being crucified. It should not surprise anyone that Warlock soon rose from the dead and triumphed over his enemies. Warlock thereupon left Counter-Earth (which would eventually be towed off to a distant solar system!), soon to begin radically different adventures under the aegis of Jim Starlin.

Back on Earth the Hulk's perennial nemesis General "Thunderbolt" Ross was being overshadowed by Colonel Jack Armbruster, a new character outwardly somewhat reminiscent of Vietnam War-era military men like General William Westmoreland. Still without their own series, three of the X-Men—Professor X, Cyclops, and Marvel Girl—turned up to take the Juggernaut prisoner after his first bout against the Hulk in issue #172. And a long-running gag was born in issue #182 when a now somewhat embarrassing character named Crackajack Jackson introduced the Hulk to what became the green goliath's favorite food: beans. [Check out VISION #5. -Me again]


GUESS I WAS SO WRAPPED UP IN MY FANTASIES, I DIDN'T SEE WHERE I WAS GOING SIDEKICK
VERY WELL-- BUT DO NOT LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN
MAN, WHAT A GROUCH THAT GUY IS
HEH WHAT FOOLS THESE MORTALS BE.

It looked as if Reed and Sue Richards were headed for divorce until their former foe, the Sub-Mariner, staged a fake attack that brought them back together again in issue #148. Sue would not rejoin the team, however, until the following year, and so the Inhuman Medusa continued filling her place in the Fantastic Four.

As if continuing the theme of romance, Medusa's sister Crystal married the mutant Avenger

Quicksilver in a crossover tale that spanned FANTASTIC FOUR #150 and AVENGERS #127. And the year of silly stories continued unabated in issue #151 as Thundra, the super-strong woman from an alternate future introduced two years earlier, encountered her personal nemesis, a brutal male heavy-handedly named Mahkizmo.

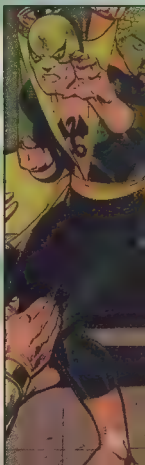
Although she never became the star of her own comic book, Thundra was still important because she represented a considerable change in the depiction of women. Most super heroines up to that point relied on powers like invisibility or casting hexes; Marvel did not have any analogue to DC's super-strong Amazon Wonder Woman. Thundra, billed as a "Femizon," was the first of a new kind of super heroine: not only was she superhumanly strong, but—in sharp contrast to Wonder Woman, who had a model's build —Thundra was formidably tall and muscular. From now on there was a Marvel heroine who could hold her own in fisticuffs with the super-strong Marvel heroes.

More interesting than FANTASTIC FOUR that year was the brand new series MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, which teamed the Thing up with different Marvel characters Writer Steve Gerber soon made the Thing the unwilling guardian of Wundarr, the alien he had created in the Man-Thing series: a super-strong adult with a baby's mind. Quickly thereafter the Thing and Captain America journeyed into the far future to aid the Guardians of the Galaxy in their war to free Earth from conquest by the alien Badoon.

It was a less than memorable year for the Golden Avenger Iron Man who found himself in stories that aimed high but fell disappointingly short. The mysterious but rather tedious Black Lama had set his War of the Super-Villains in motion, pitting Marvel's two foremost villains in the style of Fu Manchu against each other: the Yellow Claw and the Mandarin.

This was the same year that another "Iron" character was unveiled in MARVEL PREMIERE #15: the martial artist Iron Fist, created through a collaboration among Roy Thomas, Gerry Conway, Gil Kane, and Bill Everett. Whereas Shang-Chi, the Master of Kung Fu, operated in the world of the Fu Manchu novels, Iron Fist was Marvel's successful attempt to synthesize a martial arts hero with a costumed super hero.

Oddly, although the company had pioneered the use of African-American characters, Marvel circa 1974 seemed uncomfortable with building a series around an Asian character. Shang-Chi was established as being half-Caucasian; perhaps because they realized this was a mistake, writers never again referred to his Western mother after her initial appearance. Similarly, Iron Fist was Danny Rand, a Caucasian-American who had been brought up in K'un-L'un, one of the many fictional Asian lands inspired by Shangri La from the novel and film *Lost Horizon*. Located in another dimension, K'un-L'un was allegedly only accessible from Earth every ten years of Marvel time, although in over twenty years of real time since, Iron Fist and others have managed to surmount this impassable barrier an astonishing number of times.



Through slaying a dragon and taking hold of its heart, Danny gained the power of the "iron fist," enabling him to give the blows of his fist superhuman force.

Danny's mother and father had been killed through the treachery of the latter's partner, Harold Meachum. Bent on avenging his parents' deaths, Iron Fist left K'un L'un, effectively exiling himself for a decade, in order to hunt Meachum down and kill him. The masked avenger came to New York City where in the initial issues he faced numerous martial arts opponents sent to stop him.

Finally, Iron Fist confronted Meachum, only to find him a sick, crippled old man weighed down by his own guilt. It was 1974, and the Punisher's time had not yet come in the world of comics. Realizing that killing the pathetic Meachum was both useless and wrong, Iron Fist gave up the quest that had obsessed him since childhood. Ironically, a mysterious ninja then killed Meachum, and his daughter Joy blamed Iron Fist, setting up the next year's stories.

Soon after arriving in New York, Iron Fist made friends with Colleen Wing, herself an accomplished martial artist. Under her encouragement, he removed his mask at the close of one issue, ready to start a new life. There was more to life than revenge, and the Marvel Universe, though significantly darker, still shone with the light of redemption.

—Peter Sanderson

NEXT: 1974 continues, with Howard the Duck at the Congress of Realities, Doctor Strange meeting a talking caterpillar, the Celestial Madonna saga, and Captain America's new costumed identity!

MARVEL CHRONICLES 1975 PART 1

CLONINGS AND REBIRTHS

1975 was a major landmark year in Marvel history, one that relaunched a relatively minor, defunct book on a path that would make it Marvel's best-selling title and the basis for an entire family of related series. This was the year that saw the birth of the "new" X-Men.

For a while, though, it looked as if 1975 might retroactively have become the basis for reconceptualizing another classic Marvel series. For 1975 was the year that the Spider-Man clone first appeared. Had it been decided that the character we now know as Ben Reilly was the original Spider-Man, then 1975 would have marked the "real" Spider-Man's departure from his own series for twenty years!

First, let's examine The Change That Could Have Been before we turn to The Change That Worked, the recasting of the X-Men.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN writer Gerry Conway and artist Ross Andru had already introduced the Jackal, who seemed to be their new counterpart to the original Green Goblin, a grinning, criminal mastermind whose identity remained a mystery and who kept crossing Spider-Man's path. Having already tried to set the Punisher against Spider-Man, in early 1975 the Jackal came up with a new pawn, the Grizzly, a washed-up wrestler in a battlesuit that gave him superhuman strength. Unfortunately, it also made him look like a big bear with a human face.

Two issues after Spidey whupped the Grizzly, in what seemed at first an unrelated development, his late girlfriend, Gwen Stacy, turned up. Or so it had seemed. Then in issues #147 through #149 Gerry Conway's entire scenario came together. The Jackal turned out to be Parker's biology teacher, Professor Miles Warren, who had actually been introduced into the series by Stan Lee and Steve Ditko in the 1960s. (Thinking about how many of Peter's friends and associates turn out to be super-villains makes one's head reel.) Warren, a man of good taste but of uncertain mental stability, had become obsessed with another of his students, none other than the beautiful Gwen. Without telling them what he was up to, Warren had taken genetic samples from both Gwen and Peter. The Professor was busily experimenting with cloning; decades later a new generation of Spider-writers would inform us that this ordinary-looking urban academic had actually spent time as the assistant of the High Evolutionary at his futuristic headquarters in Wundagore!

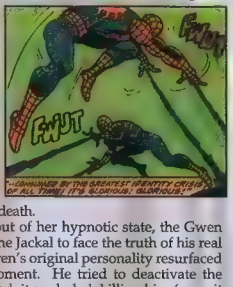
When Gwen died, Warren was consumed with grief, and presumably it was then that he began to lose his mind. Like everybody else he blamed Spider-Man for her death. He used the genetic samples he had taken from Gwen and Peter to make clones of both. When his assistant, Anthony Serba, objected, Warren killed him in a fit of insane rage. This was the last step in toppling Warren over the brink into insanity. Hysterically in denial of his own guilt, Warren convinced himself the murder was the work of an evil, jackal-like being. And so Warren became another of Marvel's sufferers of Multiple Personality Disorder; a new personality, "The Jackal," emerged and took over Warren's psyche, and his principal motive was, of course, to get revenge on Spider-Man for Gwen's death.

The Jackal aged one of the Gwen clones to the age of the real Gwen when she died and placed her under his hypnotic control; this was the Gwen double whose appearance had turned Peter Parker's life upside down. Having discovered Peter Parker was Spider-Man, the Jackal aged one of his Parker clones to Peter's then current age. Thus, the Jackal created the Spider-Clone, who would be known to readers decades later as Ben Reilly.

As the Jackal's masterstroke in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #149, he captured the unconscious Spider-Man and managed to duplicate all of his memories (which are stored in RNA molecules in

Spidey's brain) and inject them into the Spider-Clone's. Hence, both the real Spider-Man and the Spider-Clone awoke in New York City's Shea Stadium, each convinced that he was the original.

Having taken Spidey's friend Ned Leeds captive and activated a time bomb that would kill him, the Jackal ordered the two Spideys to fight to the death.



Shocked out of her hypnotic state, the Gwen clone forced the Jackal to face the truth of his real identity. Warren's original personality resurfaced at the last moment. He tried to deactivate the bomb but failed; it exploded, killing him (or so it appeared) and one of the Spider-Men. (Later it would be revealed that the Jackal in the stadium was a clone of the original, who was watching from afar.)

The surviving Spider-Man bid farewell to the Gwen clone, who left to pursue her own life; two decades later we would learn that she ended up marrying a clone of Warren's!

But now the sole remaining Spider-Man was left with a mystery: was he the original Peter Parker or not?

The architect of this storyline, Gerry Conway, left AMAZING SPIDER-MAN with issue #149, so it was left to the next writer, Archie Goodwin, to solve the problem. He had Spidey consult with his friend, scientist Curt Connors, to find the solution.

In retrospect, there was an easy way to solve the problem: the clone would not show the effects of the wear and tear the real Peter Parker's body had undergone over the years, and not just from battling criminals; for example, Peter would presumably have had dental work done over the years, and the clone wouldn't.

Instead, Goodwin went for a more poetic solution. In AMAZING #150 Spider-Man realized that he was still in love with Mary Jane Watson, but his feelings for her had not yet emerged back when Gwen was alive, at the point when Warren had taken the genetic samples. Trusting his feelings, Spidey tossed Connors' findings away, convinced he was the real, original Peter Parker.

This was a rather charming denouement, but it didn't really make sense. The Jackal had imbued the Spider-Clone with the real Spider-Man's memories, and they would include his emotional memories of loving Mary Jane.

But Spidey, certain that love conquers all, confidently dumped the Spider-Clone into the smokestack of a furnace in AMAZING #151—hardly a decent burial— and went on his merry way, unmindful of one of the first rules of Marvel continuity. That rule is that there is virtually no way to seal a can of worms so tightly that someone won't come along years later and screw it open again. It took two decades, but eventually it was decided to revive the clone storyline, bring back the Jackal, the Spider-Clone, and even the skeleton at the bottom of the smokestack (which turned out to be that of yet another clone!). Spidey rejected the idea that his love for MJ proved who's who, and Spidey and his readers spent two years trying to figure out whether Peter Parker or Ben Reilly was the "real" Spider-Man.

For a time, as you probably know, it had been decided that Ben would be the original Spider-Man, but ultimately the decision was made that Ben was the clone and Peter was the Real Thing. So the answer in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #151 turned out to be correct after all!

But it's not just heroes who get replaced every once in a while at Marvel. Every so often Marvel writers and editors get it into their heads to kill off the original version of a villain and replace him with a new guy; years later, new, or at least different, Marvel Powers That Be decide that the original version was better and bring him back. Even Stan Lee himself tried to replace the original Vulture back in the 1960s and later changed his mind. In 1975 it was Mysterio's turn: the original Mysterio was reported dead and a new character with no discernible appeal took over his identity; we had to wait four years for the real Mysterio to be brought back.

Also introduced into the Spider-Man cast in 1975 was J. Jonah Jameson's new secretary, Glory Grant, and the irascible Mamie Muggins, the landlady of Peter Parker's apartment building. (Back then it was still believable that a student like Parker could afford an apartment in Manhattan's SoHo district.)

Over in GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN #3 the web-slinger met one of the forebears of all comics super heroes, the great pulp magazine hero Doc Savage, to whom Marvel still then had the rights to feature in comics. Spidey's adventures in the original MARVEL TEAM-UP series that year, though, were abysmal, as he locked horns with the likes of Drom the Backwards Man and Baron Ludwig von Shtupf. TEAM-UP #39 and #40, though, provided an interesting footnote to classic Spidey history by introducing new versions of two of the mysterious masked mobsters of the Ditko period, the Crime-Master and the Big Man. Crime-Master II, the son of the original, killed his rival, only to learn that beneath the new "Big Man's" mask and padded costume was his girlfriend, the daughter of reporter Frederick Foswell, the original Big Man!

GIANT-SIZE SPIDER-MAN was one of a number of double-sized quarterly titles Marvel was then publishing, most of which were extensions of regular series. It was decided to relaunch the X-Men in another quarterly title, GIANT-SIZE X-MEN. Oddly enough, it began as a reprint title, so the first new story, "Second Genesis," ended up in GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #2.

As regular readers of this column know, X-MEN had been canceled a few years before; it had never been one of Marvel's best-selling titles, and the sales finally had fallen too low.

Nonetheless, Marvel soon revived the book as a reprint title, continuing the original numbering (back then, before the rise of the direct sales market, number one issues were not such a big deal). The X-Men were popular with Marvel's new crop of writers, all of whom had been Marvel fans in the 1960s; hence, they had continued to turn up in books like CAPTAIN AMERICA and MARVEL TEAM-UP. The Beast had even been spun off into his own short-lived series in AMAZING ADVENTURES. Significantly, the character had been reworked for the transition, being transformed from an otherwise normal-looking guy with big hands and feet to the furry, more animal-like Beast we see today.

So far in the "Marvel Age" when a canceled series was revived, few changes were made in the lead character: the Hulk had lost much of his intelligence on resurfacing in TALES TO ASTONISH, but was otherwise the same, while the revived Doctor Strange discarded his recent super hero-like garb for his traditional look.

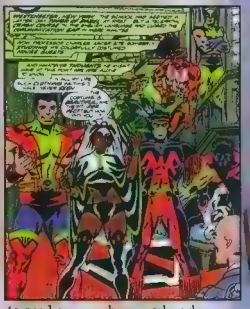
However, in the 1950s, when DC began reviving canceled Golden Age series, it often radically reconceived the characters: for example, instead of building the new GREEN LANTERN series around the original, Alan Scott, with his magic ring, DC came up with Hal Jordan and gave him a science-fictional background.

In reviving the X-Men, Marvel was following a similar pattern. It was not saying the original X-Men were no longer part of continuity, but the idea seemed to be that the series needed a new cast and a somewhat different background were it to succeed commercially in a new decade. Coming up with a radically new line-up for the team had already been a tactic used ten years earlier in THE AVENGERS.

It appears to have been Marvel editor in chief Roy Thomas who came up with the idea of making the "new" X-Men an international team. During the Lee-Kirby and Thomas-Neal Adams periods the X-Men had ranged widely over the world; including foreign members would presumably signal that the team was by no means restricted to New York's Westchester County. Besides, no doubt Thomas recognized that Marvel had with few exceptions (like the Black Panther) been preoccupied with American heroes and that perhaps it was time to explore the idea of super heroes from other lands. Thomas had already suggested to writer Len Wein that he create a Canadian mutant hero named Wolverine as a possible "new" X-Man, and the character had already debuted in INCREDIBLE HULK in 1974.

Len Wein, who had rapidly risen as a writer over the past few years, was assigned to write the first "new" X-MEN tale; he also soon took over writing SPIDER-MAN. He was teamed with artist Dave Cockrum, who had already made a name for himself as a super hero team artist on DC's LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES. (Look carefully and you will see both Wein and Cockrum drawn into the GIANT-SIZE X-MEN story.)

In this first story Wein and Cockrum had the original X-Men, including newcomers Havok and Lorna Dane (who was not yet known as Polaris), mysteriously captured on a tropical island. Only Cyclops succeeded in escaping back to Professor Charles Xavier's mansion. Xavier then set about traveling the world recruiting new X-Men to rescue the originals.



It's interesting to see how much groundwork was laid for future X-Men continuity, however unintentionally, in this first story. Xavier went to Canada to invite Wolverine to join. Wolverine was apparently so fed up with working for Canada's Department H that he immediately quit, without even knowing much about Xavier, angrily ripping apart his superior Major Chasen's tie with his claws in the process. This would have repercussions with Department H in the future.

Two foreign mutants from Roy Thomas's terms as writer of the original series returned as new members: the Banshee, from Ireland, and Sunfire, from Japan, who, however, quit after this first story. Presumably Sunfire was never truly intended to be a regular member, but was there just to prevent fans from asking why he wasn't asked to join. The Banshee's admission was another signal that from now on the X-Men would be different: in the past the X-Men were all teenagers, but Banshee was clearly middle-aged and hence closer to Xavier himself in age.

In Germany Xavier rescued the teleporting mutant Kurt Wagner from a mob out to kill him for his demon-like appearance. The Professor went to a collective farm in what was then the Soviet Union to find Peter Rasputin, a farm boy who could transform his body into organic steel, gaining superhuman strength as he did. There Xavier and the readers also spotted Peter's little sister, Illyana, a future member of another team, the New Mutants. In Africa Xavier located Ororo, a beautiful female mutant who was worshipped for her ability to control the weather; she would become the first black member of the X-Men. And in the American Southwest Xavier recruited the superhumanly strong John Proudstar, Marvel's second Native American super hero. (The first

was Red Wolf in THE AVENGERS.)

At his mansion Xavier gave costumes and code names to whoever among his new recruits did not already have them: Wagner became Nightcrawler, Peter was Colossus, Ororo appropriately became Storm, and Proudstar took the name Thunderbird.

Cyclops led the new team back to the mysterious tropical island where they rescued the original X-Men, just before the island shot out of the sea into outer space. You see, the "island" itself was a gigantic mutant, Krakoa the Living Island, which had been feeding off the life energies of its captives.

Despite being drained for all that time, the captive X-Men returned to Westchester in good health along with their rescuers, leaving Xavier with a question: how could he handle dealing with thirteen X-Men?

Of course, Thomas, Wein, and Cockrum knew the solution: in the next story all of the original X-Men would leave except for Cyclops, who somewhat pathetically clung to his life at the X-Mansion rather than follow his beloved Jean into the big, bad outside world. (Attempts to part Scott and Jean never work permanently; she would be back in the series within a year.)

Wein plotted the next storyline, which appears to have been intended for a GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #3. However, it was decided instead to move the X-Men into a regular bimonthly series—yes, back then some comics only came out every two months—and so the story was split into two parts. The new X-MEN title picked up the numbering from the reprints, and so it began not with number one but with number 94.

The story has longtime Marvel villain Count Nefaria taking over the NORAD base on Valhalla Mountain in the Rockies, thereby seizing control of America's arsenal of nuclear missiles. The X-Men, of course, intervene and stop Nefaria.

It is the story's surprise ending that makes it memorable. The impetuous Thunderbird leaps onto the jet in which Nefaria is making his escape just before it explodes. Perhaps this is another sign that the Silver Age was over: Wein knew that readers would not expect him to kill off one of the X-Men so early in the new series. Thunderbird, it seems, was created to be killed off almost immediately, but Wein never tipped his hand: the surprise at the end of issue 95 was very real. It was a sign that Wein intended that this new Marvel series would have a dark side.

Any event like this in Marvel history inevitably generates repercussions. Eventually we would meet James Proudstar, John's younger brother, who would become the new Thunderbird.

I'VE BEEN A LOSER ALL MY LIFE, XAVIER -- AN OUTCAST -- DUMPED ON BY EVERYBODY I MET--
-- BUT I'M A MAN, XAVIER. A WARRIOR OF THE APACHE--
-- AND TODAY I'M GONNA PROVE IT!!
KRAK!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, LAPORE -- GET OFF THE PLANE!!

Blaming John's death on the X-Men he would seek revenge on them, but ultimately become Warpath, a member of another mutant team, X-Force.

It may surprise readers to know that almost as soon as Len Wein had co-created the new X-Men, he too left the series. He already had a full load of assignments on leading titles like SPIDER-MAN and could not foresee the astonishing future that lay ahead for X-MEN. (In fact, even though THE X-MEN would soon become a cult favorite among Marvel's most discerning readers, it would not become a commercial blockbuster until well into the 1980s.)

As Wein has noted in interviews, the story of the new X-Men would have been quite different had he stayed on the series. He intended to make Colossus the central character and to make Nightcrawler brooding and angst-ridden. Moreover, he conceived of Wolverine as being a hot-tempered teenager!

Instead, the scripting of X-MEN #94 and 95 over Wein's plot was turned over to a then little-known newcomer, who would prove to be the last of the major Marvel writers brought in under Roy Thomas's term as editor in chief: Chris Claremont. Need I say that the rest is history?

Claremont had just taken over writing the adventures of IRON FIST in MARVEL PREMIERE, and you can see him in his second issue, #24, as the bearded guy who invites Danny Rand to join in one of the regular Marvel summer softball games in Central Park.

Claremont began making X-MEN his own with the December issue, number 96, which he plotted with assistance from another newcomer, Bill Mantlo, and scripted on his own. Claremont had already made reference to the N'garai, a race of otherdimensional monsters in the H. P. Lovecraft mode, over in GIANT-SIZE DRACULA #2. In X-MEN #96 the X-Men got to see and fight one of them, Kierrok by name. This issue also introduced Dr. Stephen Lang, who was busily recreating the Sentinels.

And it was in issue 96 that readers first met Xavier's ex-lover and fellow geneticist, Dr. Moira MacTaggert. At first she appeared to be no more than a rather feisty Scots housekeeper, but readers soon learned there was more to her than that. She abruptly joined the attack on Kierrok firing a machine gun! It was a little over the top, but it served notice that Claremont was setting about to change the way women were portrayed in super hero comics, as X-MEN would continue to demonstrate from this point onward.

AH BEG YUIR PARDON--!
NAH NAME IS MOIRA MACTAGGERT --AN' AH'VE BEEN EMBARGO AS HOUSEKEEPER HERE BY PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER--
D'YOU WANT TO MAKE SOMETHIN' OF IT, THEN?!

MARVEL CHRONICLES 20

1975 PART 2

CHURCHILL COWBOYS & THE CELESTIAL MADONNA

Today readers are used to thinking of the X-Men "family" of books, with close-knit continuity among the individual titles. Back in 1975 writer Steve Englehart anticipated such a development by forging links between the stories in the various titles he was writing, including THE AVENGERS, CAPTAIN AMERICA, and DOCTOR STRANGE.

The central axis was clearly THE AVENGERS, which in 1975 had one of the most amazing years in its long history. Not only did Englehart tie the series in with his other books, but he also linked it to Marvel series lying far outside the super hero milieu. On top of that, he used THE AVENGERS to elaborate upon important aspects of Marvel history, reaching back thousands of years to the dawn of the Kree Empire. But most importantly, Englehart was telling stories and exploring characterizations that firmly established him as one of the finest of the AVENGERS' chroniclers.

He began the year by taking his ongoing "Celestial Madonna" epic in brand new and unexpected direction. In the 1974 issues Kang the Conqueror, the warlord from the future, had returned to the Avengers' time to find and capture the Celestial Madonna, the woman prophesied to become the mother of a being who would alter the fate of the cosmos. He learned that she was Mantis, the Vietnamese martial artist allied with the Avengers.

Kang was originally a time traveler who journeyed from the far future to ancient Egypt, where he became the tyrannical Pharaoh Rama-Tut. As Tut he subsequently traveled to the 40th century A.D. and became Kang, who menaces the Avengers in the present. Eventually Kang will tire of his life of conquest and expiate his crimes by returning to ancient Egypt and his Rama-Tut identity, but this time ruling benevolently.

This kindler, gentler Rama-Tut arrived in the Avengers' time and disrupted Kang's scheme. Kang then tried to kill Mantis, but his lethal blast was intercepted by the newly reformed Swordsman. Kang and Rama-Tut grappled with each other within Kang's timeship, accidentally activating it and vanished from the watching Avengers.

The Avengers traveled to Viet Nam in issue #130, where they buried the Swordsman in the gardens of the Priests of Pama, members of the alien Kree who had raised and trained Mantis. While there the Avengers ran into a new masked champion named Nomad, who was actually their old teammate Captain America!

In the previous year in the CAPTAIN AMERICA series, Englehart had Steve Rogers become disillusioned with the federal government after discovering a traitor in its ranks. Rogers assumed a new identity as Nomad, the man without a country. He was now battling the Serpent Squad, which had been revamped into a team of costumed terrorists by its new leader, the former Madame Hydra, now known as the Viper. She had joined forces with the renegade Atlantean warlord Krang to recover the Serpent Crown, an ancient mystical power object. The Squad abducted Hugh Jones, the head of the multinational corporation Roxxon Oil (in its first Marvel appearance), and used the Crown to enslave him mentally. Nomad succeeded in foiling the Viper's plans and freeing Jones. But Jones had sensed the power the Crown could give, and he wanted more, as we shall soon see.

Back in AVENGERS #131, Kang and Rama-Tut arrived in Limbo, a strange otherdimensional realm in which the laws of time function very differently. Limbo is ruled by Immortus, an enigmatic figure who, as Kang knew, had battled the Avengers himself early in their history. Immortus imprisoned Rama-Tut, and Kang used Immortus's own technology to assemble a

new team to battle the Avengers. Among the members of this Legion of the Unliving were Captain America's old enemy, Baron Heinrich Zemo (the father of the Zemo who now leads the Thunderbolts); Frankenstein's Monster; the original android Human Torch; and the Avengers' former ally, Wonder Man.

Kang turned on Immortus, imprisoning him, as well as Rama-Tut, and teleported Hawkeye, Iron Man, Mantis, Thor, and the Vision into the catacombs beneath Immortus's palace to face the Legion of the Unliving. But Kang could not maintain his mental control over his Legionnaires. Not only did the original Torch regain his free will, but in examining the Vision, he came to the conclusion that the Vision's android body was once that of the Torch himself!

Ultimately, Hawkeye succeeded in freeing both Rama-Tut and Immortus, while Thor attacked Kang, forcing him to retreat by teleporting himself elsewhere in time.

No doubt the Avengers, who believed Immortus was their enemy, were surprised he was now on their side, but a bigger shock was still to come. Rama-Tut may have guessed the truth before he himself departed to an unknown time and place. Then Immortus revealed to the Avengers that he was the future identity of the man they knew as both Kang and Rama-Tut!

Englehart's recurring theme in his stories is that of "the rising and advancing of a spirit" (indeed, that is the translation of his co-creation Shang-Chi's name). The evolution of a man from the murderous, power-hungry Kang to the serene, wise, and reclusive Immortus is one of Englehart's finest successes in dramatizing this idea.

Beginning in issue #133, the Avengers went back in time many thousands of years to witness the beginning of the recorded history of the alien Kree race again thanks to Immortus. Back then, they were merely a tribe of blue-skinned barbarians who shared the planet Hala with a peaceful race of sentient plants called the Cotati. Eventually the emperor of the alien Skrulls who at the time were pacifists and not conquerers, came to Hala. The Emperor offered to share the benefits of their advanced science with whichever of Hala's two sentient races proved itself worthier.

And so the Skrulls staged a test, sending seventeen members of each race to separate deserted worlds to create their offering. The party of Kree were sent to Earth's moon, where, using Skrull tools, they built a great city: this is what is now known as the Blue Area of the Moon, where Uatu the Watcher makes his home. But the party of Cotati were sent to another lifeless world, which they transformed into a garden of overwhelming beauty.

Fearing that the Skrulls would decide in their rivals' favor, the Kree massacred the Cotati. Appalled, the Emperor refused to deal any further with the Kree, so the Kree killed him as well as his party. The Kree used what they learned from the captured Skrull starship to become a technologically advanced race themselves and planned to conquer the entire universe. And thus began the enmity between the Kree and the Skrulls that persists to this day; moreover, the tale implies that the Skrulls became ruthless conquerors themselves in response to the threat posed by the Kree.

The Cotati, though, were not extinct: they had left behind seed pods which grew into a new generation of their race. They formed an alliance with a Kree pacifist movement, took Cotati with them as they spread through the cosmos. The two pacifist Kree who came to Earth planted Cotati in what is now Viet Nam. There the pacifist Kree became the ancestors of the Priests of Pama, who raised Mantis, knowing she was a possible candidate for the role of Celestial Madonna.

Abruptly, the time travels ended, and Thor, Iron Man, Hawkeye, and the Vision found themselves in the gardens of the Priests of Pama, face-to-face with—amazingly—the Swordsman, whose body now radiated a green glow. The Swordsman's corpse had been reanimated by the spirit of the eldest Cotati on Earth; it was he who was to become the mate of the Celestial Madonna.

But now yet another new element entered Englehart's ever-growing epic: a crossover with one of his other series, DOCTOR STRANGE. Strange's greatest enemy, the dread Dormammu, had apparently been destroyed at the end of the Avengers-Defenders War. But now, as revealed in DOCTOR STRANGE #6, he was being "reborn" deep within the Earth, and

had imprisoned the spirit of the Earth, known in later stories as Gaea (who would one day be revealed as the mother of Thor!). He had likewise captured the Scarlet Witch and her new tutor in sorcery, Agatha Harkness, the witch from FANTASTIC FOUR.

Englehart continued the storyline in DOCTOR STRANGE, where Dormammu soon achieved full power and gigantic size, towering over mortal humans as he strode down the Grand Canyon! Strange and Clea succeeded in besting him and his sister Umar, and in the process readers learned that Clea was actually Umar's daughter! But Clea did not yet know this, nor that the dread Dormammu was her uncle.

BUT MUCH MORE THAN THAT, I LOVE YOU AS A WOMAN, BECAUSE I AM FINALLY FULLY AWARE OF MYSELF AS A MAN.
I AM NO LONGER A MYSTERIOUS SYNTHEZOID OF UNKNOWN ORIGIN! NOW I KNOW ALL OF MY LIFE, AND THAT I WAS CREATED TO BE HUMAN, BY A HUMAN FATHER!
NOW I CAN BE YOUR MAN FOR ALL MY SYNTHETIC FLESH!
I KNOW YOU CAN.

Subsequently, Englehart began a new storyline which pitted Strange once more against his rival Baron Mordo and plunged the sorcerer supreme into a series of hallucinatory realities, thanks to his old enemy Nightmare.

But let us return to THE AVENGERS and Viet Nam, where not one but three different Kangs simultaneously attacked the team, while a fourth one attempted to abduct Mantis. In fact, the four Kangs were the same one, who kept traveling to the same point in time to fight the Avengers. But once again Immortus thwarted his younger self.

And now, finally, all the plot threads came together. Immortus presided over a double wedding in GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #4. The Vision and the Scarlet Witch, having mastered true witchcraft, were now ready to be married. And Wanda's former rival for the Vision's love, Mantis, now accepted her role as the Celestial Madonna and wed the eldest of Earth's Cotati. As a kind of wedding gift, the Avengers belatedly inducted Mantis as a full member. The newlywed Mantis and Cotati transformed into pure energy and ascended into the heavens; we would not hear from them again for many years to come.

The Vision and the Witch took off for their honeymoon on the Polynesian island of Rurutu. Readers were no doubt taken aback to see the Vision show up on the beach in issue #137 wearing only a pair of swimming trunks. But it was yet another step in Englehart's character arc for him. Even in his second appearance in THE AVENGERS, Roy Thomas had already let the Vision weep. Steve Englehart had further humanized the android to the point that he could fall in love and marry. Eventually he would move the Vision and Witch out to the suburbs and make them into parents.

Meanwhile, the Avengers needed replacements for their newlyweds and the deceased Swordsman; oddly enough, they ended up advertising for new recruits on television. In response the newly furry Beast showed up in issue #137. Though this may surprise today's readers, back in 1975 it was a step up for the Beast to "graduate" from the X-Men to provisional membership in the Avengers. Moondragon, a failed candidate for the role of Celestial Madonna, became another provisional member, and in issue #141 Captain America returned to the Avengers.

Cap's resumption of his original costumed identity had not come about under happy circumstances. While Rogers had been operating as Nomad, a New York teenager named Roscoe took it upon himself to become the new Captain America. He was encouraged by the original Cap's frequent partner, the Falcon. But to take on the role of Captain America also means to take on his enemies, and the new Cap was brutally murdered by the Captain's eternal archenemy, the Red Skull.

Horrified by Roscoe's death, Steve Rogers resumed his role as Captain America in issue #183 to hunt down the Skull. In these final issues of his run on the series, Englehart resurrected the Skull's trademark gimmick from the Golden Age: his theme music that he played whenever he killed a victim, Chopin's familiar Funeral March. One would not think that a musical theme would work in a silent, visual medium like comics, but if you can imagine the march, it works very well. Englehart also gave the Red Skull another gimmick: his "dust of death," which kills his victims, tightening and discoloring the skin on their heads until they resemble—red skulls!

Englehart used the Beast's presence in AVENGERS to continue plot threads he had left over from writing the character's recently cancelled series in AMAZING ADVENTURES. One of these concerned a mysterious redhaired woman who was tracking down the Beast. She turned out in issue #141 to be Patsy Walker Baxter, former heroine of Marvel's long-running teen book PATSY WALKER, whom Englehart had reintroduced into the Beast's series.

Coincidentally, the Avengers were just about to investigate Brand, and the Beast talked them into letting Patsy come along. Brand had recently become a subsidiary of the malevolent Roxxon Oil Corporation, which was headed by our old friend Hugh Jones, now a willing servant of the Serpent Crown. When the

Avengers arrived at Brand's Long Island plant, Jones and Baxter had five members of the Squadron Supreme, the super heroes of an alternate Earth, captured both them and Patsy, who was clearly on the outs with her husband.

Meanwhile, Thor and Moondragon had embarked on their own mission. Hawkeye had disappeared, and Thor quite rightly suspected Kang. Englehart was still not finished with him. Immortus and the two Avengers tracked Kang back to the Arizona of 1873. Readers who were surprised by Englehart bringing Patsy Walker into the super hero milieu now had a bigger surprise in store in issue #142. To stop Kang's new attempt to conquer the 19th century, Hawkeye had teamed up with Kid Colt, the Rawhide Kid, the Two-Gun Kid, the Ringo Kid, and the Phantom Rider, then known as the Night Rider. Englehart had thus established Marvel's classic Western heroes as living in the Marvel Universe of the super hero comics. But this was in the December, 1975 issue; we must leave the conclusion of the story for a forthcoming chapter of the Chronicles.

THANKS FOR DOUSING OUR HAND-FLAMES, THOUGH WHEN YOU LIFTED ME OVER THE FENCE,
LIKE YOU SAID, CAP--NO TIME FOR PROTOCOL! WE'VE GOT TO FIND A FAST PLANE--FAST!
HEY YOU! STOP!!
AS IT IS, I FEEL LIKE I JUST POPPED OUT OF A
DISASTER!

Issues #141 and #142 introduced yet another important figure into the world of THE AVENGERS; one of their finest artists, George Pérez, who has only recently returned to illustrate the new "Heroes Return" incarnation of the series.

Following Englehart's departure, 1975's final issue of CAPTAIN AMERICA, #192, brought back one of Cap's recurring foes, the sinister psychiatrist Doctor Faustus. Little noticed at the time was the debut that issue of Faustus's new assistant, a comely blonde named Dr. Karla Sofen, who would later become the second costumed criminal to be known as Moonstone, and who today serves in the Thunderbolts under the name of Meteorite.

The biggest news for Captain America fans in 1975, though, was the debut of a brand new series, THE INVADERS, set during World War II and reuniting Marvel's greatest Golden Age heroes: Captain America and his sidekick Bucky, the original Human Torch and his partner Toro, and Namor the Sub-Mariner. The writer and creator of the series was, of course, Marvel's foremost Golden Age fan, Roy Thomas, who teamed here with the great comic strip artist Frank Robbins.

The series debuted with GIANT-SIZE INVADERS #1, set right after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in which Cap and his allies first clashed with the Nazis' own superhuman champion, the original Master Man. Following their victory, the legendary British Prime Minister Winston Churchill proposed that the heroes continue to work together, invading enemy territory to battle the Axis powers on their home ground. The heroes agreed, and the regular INVADERS series chronicling their wartime exploits began only two months later.

The Sub-Mariner's Golden Age leading lady, Betty Dean, turned up looking young and healthy in INVADERS #4. In 1975, though, she was the grey-haired widow Mrs. Prentiss and suffered a sad fate. Marvel launched a new series, SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP, which paired the Sub-Mariner with Doctor Doom. The Latverian monarch promised to cure Namor's Atlantean people, who had fallen into a comatose state, in exchange for becoming his ally. This uneasy partnership soon found themselves pitted against an alliance of three of Namor's foes, Attuma, Tiger Shark, and the criminal scientist Dr. Lemuel Dorcas. In the melee of battle in the second issue, Dorcas killed Betty Dean Prentiss. Namor went into a fury, finally crushing Dorcas beneath an immense boulder. Surely a character with her long history and importance to the series deserved a better death scene than the rather abrupt and off-handed one she got. But this is one Marvel death that was not reversed. Betty Dean, the Sub-Mariner's first love, was gone. I suppose that for Golden Age comics fans, the death of Betty Dean would have been as shocking as the death of Gwen Stacy had been for Silver Age readers.

—Peter Sanderson

1975 PART 3:
OF MEN AND THE MAN-THING

Looking back over Marvel history, I am sometimes surprised at how short some of the great periods of the classic series truly were. Many of the best stories Steve Gerber wrote for MAN-THING were cover-dated 1975, the year this astonishing series was canceled.

The Man-Thing himself was a human being, Ted Sallis, transformed into a nearly mindless creature who stood guard over a swamp that housed "the nexus of all realities," a place where virtually anything could happen. Gerber's stories were not about the Man-Thing himself but about the personalities of the many people who crossed his path.

In this year we met Dr. Maura Spinner, a modern woman who was captured by Captain Jebediah Fate, who commanded a flying pirate ship displaced from its proper time. Being caught up in these weird circumstances released buried sides of Dr. Spinner's character; first, she became the pirate queen Maura Hawke, venting a far more aggressive side of her personality than modern society would allow. But finally she discovered the opposite side of her psyche, her capacity for love, through the self-sacrifice of a grotesque satyr named Khordes, who was nonetheless deeply in love with her.

Maura's fantastic adventure was followed by Gerber's most poetic and atmospheric MAN-THING tale, "A Candle for Sainte-Cloud," about a bohemian young woman living in 1970s New York who encounters Ted Sallis in a brief moment of happy respite from the life's path that will lead him to his horrible transformation.

Meanwhile, in the GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING series, Gerber and artist Alfredo Alcala conjured an adventure that took the readers and the young Earth-born sorceress Jennifer Kale to the otherdimensional world of her young swordsman friend, Korrek. It was a tale of their coming of age: Korrek by avenging the death of his father, and Kale by witnessing the death of her beloved mentor, the eccentric wizard Dakimh the Enchanter.

The next issue of GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING was a landmark story in its time, "The Kid's Night Out," in which a high school girl, Alice, investigates the demise of a schoolmate named Edmund, a social outcast, and discovers that virtually his entire community, through its insensitivity, shares responsibility for his despair and death.

The series saved one of its strangest surprises for the final issue, #22, which opened with Steve Gerber himself resigning as writer of MAN-THING. It turned out that Dakimh the Enchanter, who from now on would admit only to being "technically dead," had been conveying the stories that Gerber would write down for publication. In the course of wrapping up the series, Gerber found himself, through occult means, temporarily merging with the Man-Thing, experiencing the empathic creature's sensations, in an apt metaphor for the link between the writer and his subject. The intensity of vicariously experiencing the feelings of the characters had proved emotionally exhausting, and so Gerber felt he had to leave for the sake of his own well-being.

So, those of you Vertigo readers who were fascinated by the last issue Grant Morrison wrote of ANIMAL-MAN, in which Animal-Man met Morrison, be advised that Steve Gerber had done a similar tale nearly two decades before. Indeed, Gerber's MAN-THING really was a forerunner of the psychologically intense supernatural fantasy series that would proliferate in comics in the 1980s and 1990s.

Gerber wrote super hero

stories as well, but put his own distinctive stamp on them. For example, he took over a conventional super hero team book, THE DEFENDERS, and rapidly transformed it into an increasingly unconventional one. Take, for example, his new team of villains for the book, the Headmen. Dr. Arthur Nagan's human head had been transplanted onto a powerful gorilla's body. Dr. Jerold Morgan had used a gas that shrunk his skeleton but not his skin, which now drooped grotesquely over his reduced frame. Their partner, Chondu the Mystic, was a sorcerer who

looked comparatively normal—for now. Longtime comics readers might have realized that each of these three characters had starred in science fiction stories Marvel had published before the new era of super hero series, and all three stories had recently been republished in a single issue of Marvel's reprint series, WEIRD WONDER TALES.

Perhaps the strangest character Gerber introduced during his DEFENDERS run, however, was the infamous Elf with a Gun. The Elf first turned up in DEFENDERS #25, in which he shot Tom and Linda Pritchitt, two characters making their first—and last—appearance in a Marvel story. The Elf would continue making these inexplicable appearances throughout Gerber's DEFENDERS stint, shooting people with no apparent rhyme or reason.

Years after Gerber left DEFENDERS, Ralph Macchio had the Elf run over by a truck in Marvel's second KISS book, which he wrote; still later, J. M. DeMatteis tried to explain the elf as a messenger trying to alert the Defenders of a threat to the world. But I suspect that, if you really have a feel for Gerber's work, then you understand that there is no explanation for the Elf, and probably no way to dispose of him. The Elf was an expression of Gerber's macabre sense of humor and his liking for the surreal. If the Elf has any deeper meaning, then he is a symbol of the absurdity and random violence of existence, both of which are themes throughout Gerber's work.

In issue #5 of GIANT-SIZE DEFENDERS we saw as the freedom fighters of an alternate future, the Guardians of the Galaxy, traveled back to the Defenders' time, where they met Guardians leader Vance Astro's younger self, the boy known as Vance Astrovik. Later Marvel stories would show how the Vance of the present day would reach a "point of divergence" between two alternate timelines. In one alternate timeline he would grow up to become Vance Astro of the Guardians. But in "mainstream" reality Vance would take a different path, in which he is now known as the teenage super hero Justice, a member of the New Warriors.

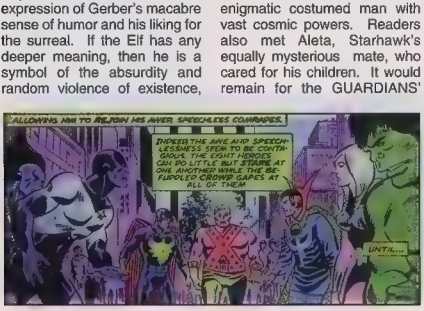
The Defenders team accompanied the Guardians of the Galaxy to their far future time, where they helped the Guardians win their first major victory in overthrowing the alien Badoon, who had conquered the Earth of that time. During this storyline Gerber gave the readers a grand overview of this alternate future, establishing the futures of DEATHLOK and KILLRAVEN series as part of the same timeline as that of GUARDIANS.

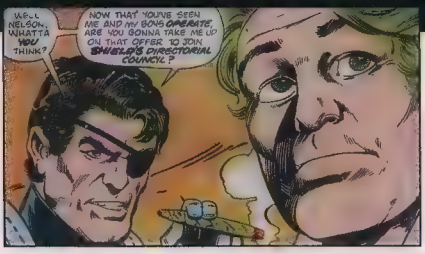
It was also in this multi-parter that the Guardians first encountered Starhawk, an enigmatic costumed man with vast cosmic powers. Readers also met Aleta, Starhawk's equally mysterious mate, who cared for his children. It would remain for the GUARDIANS' own forthcoming series to reveal that Starhawk and Aleta had somehow fused into a single being, and only one of them could manifest himself or herself in the physical world at one time. This was a variation on the situation in which Captain Mar-Vell and Rick Jones had found themselves. In this case Gerber appeared to be devising a symbol for the duality of male and female sides of the same being, or perhaps for the union of two people in love; Aleta and Starhawk had indeed joined both emotionally and physically.

The final major character Steve Gerber introduced into THE DEFENDERS series this year was Korvac, a cyborg from the future who, along with various alien villains, was pitted against Daredevil and the Defenders in GIANT-SIZE DEFENDERS #3. This was yet another of the diabolical games played by the alien Grandmaster, whom Daredevil finally bested by daring him to bet "heads" or "tails" on a coin toss! Years later writer Jim Shooter would remake Korvac into one of the Avengers' most formidable adversaries, Michael, "the Enemy," who wielded enough cosmic power to reshape the cosmos. Korvac's various cohorts would return in the GUARDIANS' 1990s series as the "Minions of Menace."

Compared to the creative fireworks in the Gerber titles, many of Marvel's core books seemed relatively mundane. But there was still a good deal worth noting in these books in 1975.

For example, if current DAREDEVIL readers think that Foggy Nelson's sister, Candace, is a new character, they are mistaken: Candace was a frequent presence in 1975's DAREDEVIL issues. But there was even bigger news in Foggy's life that year: rather inexplicably, Nick Fury offered to make him an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.!


ALLOWING HIM TO REJOIN HIS AWED, SPEECHLESS COMRADES.
THEREIN THE AWE AND SPEECHLESSNESS SEEM TO BE CONTAGIOUS. THE EIGHT HEROES CAN DO LITTLE BUT STARE AT ONE ANOTHER WHILE THE BEFUDDLED CROWD GAPES AT ALL OF THEM.
UNTIL...



Foggy's career as a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent never got off the ground, but Fury and his agents stuck around for four memorable issues of DAREDEVIL, #120-123, written by Tony Isabella, now known to comics fans as a columnist for Comic Buyer's Guide. Fury and S.H.I.E.L.D. had lost their own series, but they remained a continual presence as guest stars in different Marvel series, as did their opposite number, the subversive organization Hydra.

During the last several months of 1975 DAREDEVIL introduced three new characters of note. Foggy Nelson had become New York City's District Attorney, which, admittedly, was somewhat more credible than his being a S.H.I.E.L.D. agent, but he was soon to be unseated by a new candidate, Blake Tower, first seen in issue #124.

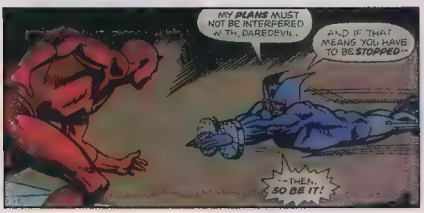
Two issues later ex-football player Brock Jones acquired a costume whose jets propelled him through the air as the Torpedo. We would later learn that this costume had been created by the alien Dire Wraiths, the villains of a future Marvel series, ROM

In that same issue, #126, readers first met the spoiled young heiress Heather Glenn, destined to become Matt Murdock's girlfriend—and a source of major personal problems for him.

Although Susan Richards had been reconciled with her husband Reed after their recent estrangement, she still had not rejoined the Fantastic Four as 1975 began. Hence, the Inhuman Medusa was still acting as her substitute when the Fantastic Four once again faced off against their perennial archenemy, Doctor Doom. This time Doom had forced the Silver Surfer to side with him, claiming to be married to the Surfer's beloved from his homeworld, Shalla Bal! Len Wein started the story, which built towards the revelation that Doom's supposed wife was really an Earthwoman named Helena, who, by a staggeringly unlikely coincidence, looked exactly like Shalla Bal. But Roy Thomas finished the story line, adding a new twist: Helena was indeed the amnesiac Shalla Bal, whom the Surfer's own archfoe, Mephisto, had transported to Earth! (And if we are to believe recent revelations in SILVER SURFER, this Shalla Bal was a fake, and so Mephisto too was deceived!)

Sue returned to the F.F. in time for a complex story line concocted by Roy Thomas that involved an interdimensional war fomented by the Avengers' Conan-like adversary, Arkon the Imperion.

Once again drawing on his love of the comics of past decades, Roy Thomas reintroduced the 1950s super hero Marvel Boy in FANTASTIC FOUR #164. Marvel Boy's father, a pioneer of space travel decades before NASA existed, had raised him amidst the advanced civilization inhabiting the planet Uranus! Marvel Boy later fought crime on Earth using the energy powers of his Uranian wristbands. Upon discovering the Uranians wiped out by a mysterious disaster, Marvel Boy went insane. Returning to Earth as an adult calling himself the Crusader, he battled the Fantastic Four until his wristbands overloaded and finally disintegrated him. The wristbands, though, later fell into the hands of Wendell Vaughn, who used them in his role as Quasar, protector of the universe.



...I ENTERED A NOOK INTO HIEROGLYPHS MY "OPPONENT" EXPECTED WORRIED BEHIND HIM...
HELLO, RUSSELL! THEY TOLD ME TO ANNOUNCE MYSELF AS THE MOON KNIGHT.
PRETTY STUPID NAME--BUT IT'LL DO AS FAR AS YOU'RE CONCERNED--

The most significant event in FANTASTIC FOUR that year, though, took place in GIANT-SIZE FANTASTIC FOUR #4, in which the F.F. encountered a teenage mutant named Jamie Madrox, who could generate duplicates of himself. At the story's end, the F.F. put Jamie in touch with Professor Charles Xavier, setting him on the path that would make him a member of X-Factor years later under the name of Multiple Man.

The Thing did not have a memorable year in MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE, but one issue may be of interest to Marvel trivia aficionados. Issue #11 was a conclusion to the short-lived GOLEM series in STRANGE TALES #174-177, first written by Len Wein. This was an unusual experiment, inasmuch as most comics heroes up till now were presumed to be Protestant. The golem, though, is a creature of Jewish legend: an artificially created being that comes to life to battle the enemies of the Jewish people. A golem had already appeared in HULK #134 in 1970; after the demise of the GOLEM series in STRANGE TALES, a World War II golem would be introduced in the pages of THE INVADERS.

THE INCREDIBLE HULK remained as ever entertaining throughout 1975 but not innovative. The only landmark event, and this was a minor one, was the introduction of Glorian, a golden-skinned humanoid whom the alien Shaper of Worlds was teaching to reshape reality. Glorian, it turned out, proved to be Thomas Gideon, the son of the Fantastic Four's former foe, the billionaire Gregory Gideon; as for the Shaper, he would eventually be revealed to be a Cosmic Cube that had achieved sentience!

The War of the Super-Villains in IRON MAN led to the unmasking of its instigator, the Black Lama, as King Jerald, an otherdimensional counterpart of then-President Gerald Ford. The nasty old Black Lama turned out to be a nice guy after all, who needed Iron Man's help to protect him and his daughter Princess Susan (based on President Ford's daughter Susan) from their enemy Baron Rockler (based on Ford's political cohort Nelson Rockefeller, who actually wasn't a bad guy). Let's just say this wasn't one of the Golden Avenger's golden moments.

More interesting is the fact that issue #72 was set at the San Diego Comic Convention, which was then only a few years old! This was the first appearance of that new institution, the comic book convention, in a Marvel comic.

For the Asgardian fans, to save the life of Thor's former beloved, nurse Jane Foster, his current true love, the goddess Sif, physically merged with her! As a result, Jane Foster, showing new courage and spirit (either a result of having absorbed Sif or of reflecting 1970s feminism), once again became the leading lady in THOR.

And there was so much more in 1975! Having left the X-Men, the Angel and Iceman joined with Hercules, the Black Widow, and the original Ghost Rider to form Marvel's first California-based super-team in THE CHAMPIONS. The monster hunter Ulysses Bloodstone debuted in MARVEL PRESENTS, and a modern man found himself in a prehistoric world in the Bermuda Triangle—no, not the Savage Land—in SKULL THE SLAYER. Conan's female counterpart, Red Sonja, now in her trademark iron bikini, received her own solo series in MARVEL FEATURE.

Perhaps the most prolific writer Marvel had, Doug Moench, was busy on WEREWOLF BY NIGHT, and introduced a new character in issue #32, Moon Knight, who would soon gain a series of his own. But Moench's greatest work of this period was his collaboration with the highly talented artist Paul Gulacy on MASTER OF KUNG FU, which they transformed into a series of gritty, atmospheric, exciting thrillers in the James Bond tradition. In 1975 alone they introduced classic characters like Shang-Chi's lover Leiko Wu; his rival, Shen Kuei, alias Cat; Cat's own lover, Juliette; the villains Carlton Velcro and Mordillo, and the latter's toy-like robot companion, Brynocki.

And in the closing pages of the final two issues of GIANT-SIZE MAN-THING, by popular demand, came the first solo adventures of the scene-stealing character from MAN-THING, Howard the Duck. It seemed that after he tumbled from sight in MAN-THING #1, Howard fell through an interdimensional void and landed in Cleveland, long, long before its recent urban renaissance. Steve Gerber, of course, was the writer, teamed up with the brilliant artistry of Frank Brunner. These first two stories pitted Howard against parodies of horror film menaces: the enormous Garko the Man-Frog and the vampiric Bessie the Hellcow.

But there were much bigger things in store for Howard. As we shall see, in 1976 America is a country where any man, woman, or duck can become president!

—Peter Sanderson

1976 PART 1:
THE RETURN OF THE KING

It had been a shock when Jack Kirby left Marvel in 1970. Next to Stan Lee, Kirby had been the man most responsible for the creation and development of the Marvel Universe in the 1960s. But Kirby had wanted to strike out on his own and had left for DC Comics (then still known as National Periodical Publications) where he could create, draw, plot, script, and edit his own words. So it was perhaps almost as great a surprise to readers when in 1976 Kirby came back to Marvel.

Certainly Kirby had been creatively prolific in his half decade at DC. There he had assembled his legendary and highly influential masterpiece, the great "Fourth World" tetralogy of comics: The New Gods, The Forever People, Mister Miracle, and a thoroughly revamped Jimmy Olsen that tied Superman himself into this new mythos. Kirby likewise launched two other classics, KAMANDI, THE LAST BOY ON EARTH and THE DEMON, as well as doing various other projects ranging from IN THE DAYS OF THE MOB to a run of the war series, THE LOSERS.

Nevertheless, Kirby had grown dissatisfied at DC. For example, he had intended his Fourth World books to be limited series, but DC first would not allow him to bring the storyline to an end, and then cancelled the books for reasons that remain subjects of controversy. And in the mid-seventies, the rise of the independent comic companies was still a half decade away. Basically, there were only two games in town in the comics business.

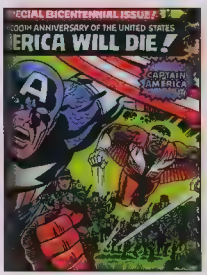
So it was that Kirby returned to Marvel for what would prove to be his last stay there. This time, just as he had at DC, Kirby would not only plot and draw his books, but would script and edit them as well. Actually, this kind of independence, unheard of only a short time before, was no longer unusual in comics. In the 1960s Stan Lee had edited the comics he himself wrote, and edited those written by new writers like Roy Thomas.

Then Thomas became editor in chief and hence became his own editor. A pattern was established by which writers with staff positions would rise to the rank of editor in chief, and then leave staff to devote themselves to writing full time. Being a full-time writer was not only more creatively fulfilling, they found, but also, if they were prolific enough, more profitable. But when an editor in chief stepped down, he continued to edit the books he wrote himself. So it was that Roy Thomas and his successors as editor in chief—Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, and Gerry Conway—became the first of the writer-editors. Kirby, of course, was never editor in chief, but he preferred remaining in Southern California, where he had moved years before, and, in effect, packaging his titles for Marvel out there; hence, he too was made a writer-editor. As you can see, there was also a rapid turnover of editor in chiefs in these years; in 1976 Gerry Conway left the post after a very brief term and Archie Goodwin took over the position. Goodwin would remain in place until Jim Shooter took over in 1978, to remain for nearly a decade thereafter.

It was only appropriate that the returning Jack Kirby take over writing and drawing CAPTAIN AMERICA. Kirby and his former partner Joe Simon had created the character thirty-five years before; Kirby and Stan Lee had revived the Captain in the 1960s. Moreover, it was 1976, the year of the United States' Bicentennial, and, by a wonderful coincidence, the year that Cap's own book reached its two hundredth issue.

By now Cap's series had been renamed CAPTAIN AMERICA AND THE FALCON, but, although Kirby had not had a hand in creating the Falcon, he kept him on board as Cap's partner and handled the character well. By the end of the year Kirby reintroduced into the regular cast a character he had co-created: Cap's longtime girlfriend, SHIELD agent Sharon Carter, who has recently reappeared in the CAPTAIN AMERICA comics of the 1990s.

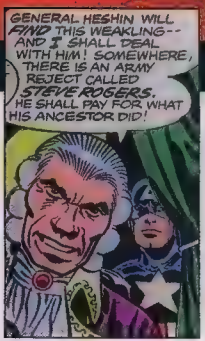
Kirby's work during his 1970s Marvel stint was different from what Marvel readers might have expected. One of the Marvel Revolution's claims to fame was that it had brought a greater sense of reality to the fantasy world of super heroes. A trademark of Kirby's super hero work was the way that he brought his superhuman characters in contact with normal, everyday people. But Kirby also used the comics medium to exaggerate reality and to come up with larger than life,



highly stylized characters. Remember, only several years before he was creating characters with names like Granny Goodness and Glorious Godfrey at DC.

So in his initial new storyline for CAPTAIN AMERICA, Kirby pitted Cap against a subversive organization that wanted to undo the American Revolution. These

IT'S A BAD BREAK FOR ALL OF US! THINGS WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO TURN OUT THIS WAY, BUT THEY HAVE!
WHAT DO YOU WANT US TO DO? GIVE UP?
WE'RE LOSERS! THAT'S ALL WE'VE EVER BEEN! LOSERS!
SHARON--? SHARON--!


GENERAL HESHIN WILL FIND THIS WEAKLING-- AND I SHALL DEAL WITH HIM! SOMEWHERE, THERE IS AN ARMY REJECT CALLED STEVE ROGERS. HE SHALL PAY FOR WHAT HIS ANCESTOR DID!

were the Royalists, who not only wanted to reinstitute monarchy, but who dressed in powdered wigs and 18th century costumes! They were led by William Taurey and General Heshin, whose names were puns on "tory" (a supporter of the English during the Revolution) and "Hessian" (one of the German soldiers fighting on the British side).

The Royalist storyline culminated in issue #200, and was followed by the saga of the Night People of Zero Street, a strange population living beneath the streets of New York City. Here Kirby was in his own way anticipating the rise of New York's homeless population. Also, as usual, Kirby was dealing with a concept—the underground community—before other, younger writers did their own takes on it, as Claremont did with the Morlocks, Frank Miller with the sewer people, and Peter David with the Abomination's cohorts.

The special one-shot, CAPTAIN AMERICA'S BICENTENNIAL BATTLES, was a particularly personal project for Kirby. Continually experimenting in the 1970s, Marvel had begun doing reprints in large tabloid formats and occasionally did new stories in this format as well, such as this one. In it Cap encountered the mysterious Mister Buda, who resembled an Asian mystic but who had extraordinary powers to transcend time and space. (Mister Buda would later be established to be the Contemplator, one of the virtually immortal aliens known as the Elders of the Universe.) Mister Buda sent Cap back to various important points in American history. So it was that Cap encountered Benjamin Franklin (as Doctor Strange would do as well in 1976!) and Betsy Ross, who was, of course, inspired by the Captain's costume. Significantly, Cap's time travels addressed racial questions in America's past: he crossed paths with Geronimo, with the abolitionist John Brown, and with an escaped slave. Cap was present during the great Chicago Fire and during World War I, and, of course, returned to World War II to encounter Adolf Hitler and the Red Skull—and his late partner Bucky— once again. Cap even got to meet the young Jack Kirby before his time traveling was done!

It seemed only right that Jack Kirby, the cartoonist who so powerfully evoked the epic scale and mystery of the cosmos, should create a comics adaptation of that landmark of science fiction films, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The movie had actually come out quite some time before, 1968, but better late than never. Kirby started out with an adaptation of the film, but in subsequent issues he devised new stories about characters who came in contact with one of the film's mysterious monoliths. Within a year the 2001 book evolved in Kirby's hands into a very different series, MACHINE MAN, as we shall see in installments to come.

Kirby's work on CAP and 2001 in 1976 might be considered secondary to his creation of his last great super hero series, THE ETERNALS. It clearly has similarities to the Fourth World books. Once again, Earth serves as a battlefield between two rival superhuman races, and normal human beings become involved in the conflict. But whereas Kirby's New Gods had come from distant alien worlds, the Eternals and the Deviants were native to Earth. Moreover, in ages past, humanity had worshipped the mountain-dwelling Eternals as gods; indeed, many of the Eternals' names resembled those of characters from Greek mythology. The sinister and grotesque Deviants, on the other hand, who dwelt beneath the earth's surface, had inspired the legends of devils and demons. Kirby described both the Eternals and Deviants as evolutionary offshoots of humanity's own ancestors: perhaps the implication was that the Eternals and Deviants represented, respectively, the best and worst potentials of the human race that existed, genetically and geographically, between them.

Whereas the dynamic in THE NEW GODS was a struggle between the good and evil superhumans, in THE ETERNALS this conflict was overshadowed by a looming, greater threat. In the first issue the Fourth Host of the Celestials arrives on Earth, setting in motion new activity in the world of mortals by both the Eternals and the Deviants, who had both long remained hidden from the rest of humanity. The Celestials are colossal in size; they appear to have humanoid form, but every inch of their immense bodies is concealed by armor; they do not speak or communicate in any way that we humans can comprehend. The Celestials' plans, their motives, and their very natures remain utterly enigmatic.

But we do know one thing: they have come to judge the people of Earth. Ages ago the First Host of the Celestials had visited Earth and performed genetic experiments on humanity's apelike ancestors, resulting in the

evolution of the human race, the Eternals, and the Deviants. Now the Fourth Host had come to watch their creations for the next fifty years. If humanity did not live up to the Celestials' inscrutable standards, it would be destroyed.

Once again, Kirby was decades ahead of his time. Had THE ETERNALS been created in the 1990s, as the turn of the millennium looms before us, more people would have realized what he was doing. In THE ETERNALS Kirby created a sense that a time is quickly approaching when an age of history comes to an end, and humanity must both take stock of what it has accomplished and face up to an unknown, perhaps dangerous, destiny.

Kirby also turned out plenty of covers for Marvel titles, especially for characters he had helped create, such as THE FANTASTIC FOUR and THE AVENGERS, or Captain America in THE INVADERS.

Moreover, by now Marvel was full of young writers and artists who had spent the 1960s as fervent fans of Jack Kirby's work. They were so happy to have him back at Marvel that some of them put him into the stories themselves! Take a look at IRON MAN #85 and there he is, along with Stan Lee, and a whole pack of 1976 Marvelites, including Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Archie Goodwin, John Romita, Sr., Marie Severin (who did the Bullpenners' faces)—and even Neal Adams, who wasn't even working there anymore!

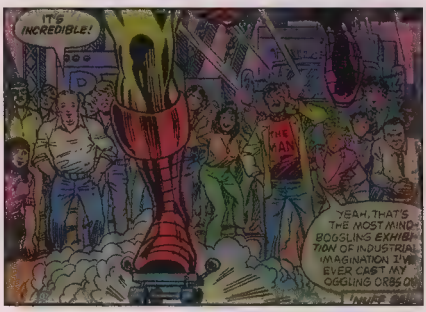
Len Wein wrote this issue and a number of others in early 1976, introducing Michael O'Brien, a detective investigating the death of his brother Kevin, the original Guardsman; Michael would go on to become the new Guardsman and a long-running Marvel supporting character in IRON MAN, THE AVENGERS, and elsewhere. Wein was soon succeeded by Bill Mantlo, who updated the Iron Man foe Jack Frost into the more sleekly costumed Blizzard. There swiftly followed Archie Goodwin and a significant new Marvel arrival, future editor in chief Jim Shooter, before Gerry Conway settled into the post of IRON MAN writer for an extended stay.

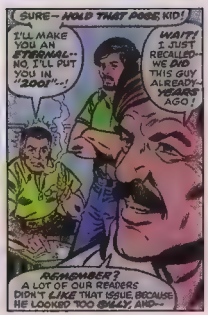
Conway's cleverest stroke in his run was to bring back Madame Masque, Tony Stark's former love on the wrong side of the law, but in disguise. In a blonde wig and one of those perfect face masks that only exist in comics, Masque posed as new secretary Krissy Longfellow, the better to watch over Tony's safety, unknown even to him.

Jack Kirby's appearance in IRON MAN was merely a walk-on; in FANTASTIC FOUR #176, though, he and Stan Lee were both major players with plenty of dialogue in perhaps the funniest FANTASTIC FOUR story ever published. Followers of Marvel VISION's "Silly Moments" column already know what I'm talking about: the day the shape-changing Impossible Man invaded the Marvel offices and threw them into chaos (well, more chaos than usual)! (VISION #21.—Tim)

Once again, a whole parade of Marvelites were on view: Roy Thomas, who wrote the story; Goodwin; Wein; Wolfman; Romita; Severin; Gerry Conway; newcomers Jim Shooter and Roger Stern; and another recent arrival, new F. F. artist George Perez, who drew the story complete with all the Bullpen faces (which until then had always been Marie Severin's territory).

Interestingly, this story also explained the role that Marvel Comics play in the Marvel Universe itself. Back in FANTASTIC FOUR #10, Stan had already established that the Fantastic Four told him and Jack Kirby their adventures, which they then transcribed in comics form.


IT'S INCREDIBLE!
THE MAN
YEAH, THAT'S THE MOST MIND-BOGGLING EXHIBITION OF INDUSTRIAL IMAGINATION I'VE EVER CAST MY OGGLING ORBS ON!


SURE—HOLD THAT POSE, KID!
I'LL MAKE YOU AN ETERNAL—NO, I'LL PUT YOU IN "2001"...!
WAIT! I JUST RECALLED—WE DID THIS GUY ALREADY—YEARS AGO!
REMEMBER? A LOT OF OUR READERS DIDN'T LIKE THAT ISSUE BECAUSE HE LOOKED TOO SILLY, AND—

In effect, the FANTASTIC FOUR comic book was a licensed biography of the F. F.! In this new tale Stan insists in the story that everything that Marvel publishes is the truth about the super heroes and Marvel never, ever just makes something up!

So in the Marvel Universe Marvel Comics are like newspapers in pictorial form, serving as the super heroes' own official press releases about themselves! Now when you think about it, that means the comics in the Marvel Universe can't reveal anything about heroes' secret identities. And would there be comics about "outlaw heroes" like the X-Men and the Hulk? In the story itself we see a poster of Red Sonja; does that mean the Roy Thomas of Marvel-Earth spent his time researching historical documents from the Hyborian Age in order to write comics about her?

The Impossible Man story served as comic relief after Roy Thomas's two major FANTASTIC FOUR storylines of the year. In the first Ben Grimm was once again cured of being the Thing, only to be replaced in the F. F. by Luke Cage, Hero for Hire. Ben eventually returned to the F. F.'s ranks wearing a battlesuit designed to look like the Thing; inevitably, of course, Ben reverted to the Thing's form once more.

There was also a long storyline in which Galactus once again threatened various inhabited worlds. But this is perhaps best remembered by two intentionally comic moments. The F. F. were warned of the danger by one of the High Evolutionary's New Men, a talking golden gorilla named Gorr who scaled the Chrysler Building in a clear nod to King Kong (and maybe to DC's golden ape Congorilla). And finally, Galactus suffered the most humiliating defeat of his career when he consumed the Impossible Man's planet Poppup—and got indigestion! (VISION #7. — Scorekeeping Tim)

Yes, all the other Poppupians died in the process, but, strangely, this didn't matter. It turned out that the Poppupians had a group consciousness, and so as long as

the Impossible Man himself was still alive, they all were. This, it seems, is what Impy meant in his very first story when he announced, "We Poppupians have no names! We know who we are!" When everybody is the same person, who needs names? Also when Impy broke into the Bullpen, an entire planet's population had invaded Mighty Marvel!

Marvel chose the bicentennial year to create a brand new character who was, in his own way, in the tradition of Kirby's Captain America—but most American comics readers never knew it at the time! For some time Marvel had a British department in its New York offices, putting together reprint comics specially designed for the United Kingdom. Eventually, it was decided to create new material for the British market as well, starting with a new Marvel super hero who would be English, not American. The task was turn over to new British-born writer Chris Claremont and veteran HULK artist Herb Trimpe, and the result was Captain Britain, future star of the EXCALIBUR comic.

For now, though, Captain Britain only appeared in a new weekly British comic named after him. In the initial issues young English graduate student Brian Braddock was working at a research center when it was attacked by a criminal known as the Reaver. Braddock fled on his motorcycle only to accidentally run off a cliff. Near death, Brian had a vision of two godlike beings, who would years later be revealed to be the mysterious Merlyn and his daughter Roma. They bade him choose between two mystical objects, the sword of might or the amulet of right. Brian, of course, chose the latter, and immediately found himself healed and garbed in the costume of Captain Britain. He thereupon set about defeating the Reaver and his men; from then on Captain Britain would be Great Britain's costumed champion.

Claremont did not remain with the CAPTAIN BRITAIN series long, being preoccupied with this new book about mutants you may have heard of. But Chris was there long enough to create Brian's twin sister Betsy, whom he and artist Alan Davis would one day turn into the telepathic X-Man called Psylocke. Likewise Chris came up with other characters who would one day resurface in EXCALIBUR: Brian's girlfriend Courtney Ross, his ne'er-do-well brother Jamie, and detective Dai Thomas.

And speaking of Chris Claremont, Jack Kirby made one more appearance in a Marvel comic in 1976. Issue #98 of the newly reborn X-MEN series found the merry mutants in civilian dress (heavily layered) at Rockefeller Center at Christmastime. Among the many holiday revelers artist Dave Cockrum drew into the crowd were himself, new X-writer Chris Claremont, Matt Murdock, Nick Fury, and a contingent from the Distinguished Competition consisting of editorial legend Julius Schwartz and reporters C. Kent and L. Lane. In this season of mistletoe, the formerly shy Jean Grey and Scott Summers launched into a big Christmas kiss right in front of Stan and Jack, their very own creators. Heck, that's like doing it in front of your parents. Stan and Jack commented that, "those kids didn't act like that back in their day."

They were right, too. The new X-MEN was rapidly changing into a series unlike any that Marvel had seen before, and X-MEN #100 would prove to be a turning point with major repercussions right up through the present—as we shall see next time!

—Peter Sanderson

1976 PART 2:
BY THE TIME I GET TO PHOENIX

It had been less than a year since the birth of the "new " X-MEN series, and already writer Chris Claremont and artist Dave Cockrum were laying the groundwork for a cosmic epic, the likes of which the old X-MEN book had never seen. The original X-Men had fought the alien Z'nox, but had not had to leave Earth in the process. This time, matters would be quite different.

In issue #97 Cyclops' brother Alex, alias Havok, and his green-haired mutant girlfriend Lorna Dane fell under the control of a mysterious armored figure calling himself Eric the Red. What made this new villain all the more puzzling was the fact that "Eric the Red" was a guise that Cyclops himself had concocted years before; this was a homage that Claremont and Cockrum were paying to the 1960s storyline that had introduced Lorna. It was, by the way, under the new Eric's control that Lorna first assumed her super hero name of Polaris, under which she is known today in X-FACTOR.

The second Eric the Red would prove to be Davan Shakari, an intelligence agent of the new extraterrestrial race that Claremont and Cockrum were introducing, the Shi'ar. In this same issue Professor Xavier began having nightmares about a spaceship, piloted by a being in a space suit and a bug-like helmet, fleeing through space from other starships. The pilot would eventually be revealed as the Shi'ar princess Lilandra, who was in search of help against Shakari's liege, her evil brother D'ken, who now ruled the Shi'ar's galactic empire.

But even the introduction of the Shi'ar takes second place in the history of the X-Men to another major event in 1976. This centered on Jean Grey, alias Marvel Girl. Even though Len Wein had written her out in issue #95 along with most of the other original X-Men, in #97 Claremont brought her back into the series, albeit in an unofficial capacity. The love between Scott Summers and Jean Grey has always been the heart of the X-MEN series, and Claremont was returning it to center stage. As noted in our last installment, issue #98 opened with Scott and Jean on a date in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center on Christmas Eve, briefly crossing the paths of their own creators, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. It was there that two more X-Men, Colossus and Nightcrawler, first encountered their own future girlfriends, Amanda Sefton and Betsy Wilford. Amanda would turn out not only to be Nightcrawler's foster sister but also a sorceress who in recent years has become associated with the British super-team Excalibur.

Nevertheless, this Christmas would hardly prove to be the stuff of warm, nostalgic memories for the X-Men. Jean and other X-Men were attacked and captured by a new breed of the mutant-hunting robots known as the Sentinels. This time, it was not the Sentinels' original creator, Dr. Bolivar Trask, or his son Larry who was behind the robots' rampage, but a fanatic named Dr. Steven Lang, who, as issue #100 would show, had been given virtually unlimited financial backing by an enigmatic organization called the Council of the Chosen.

Lang held Jean and his other captives prisoners on a space station. Xavier and the other X-Men went to the rescue by prevailing upon Xavier's friend Dr. Peter Corbeau, the scientist who headed the solar observatory Starcore, whom Claremont had introduced in INCREDIBLE HULK #148, one of his very first Marvel writing assignments, back in 1972! Corbeau somehow smuggled the mutants onto a space shuttle being launched into orbit, which Corbeau then crash-landed onto the space station!

Once the "new" X-Men were all aboard, they found themselves face to face with—the "old" X-Men! It was now X-MEN #100, and a clash between the original and current teams was the obvious way to mark the anniversary. In fact, the "original X-Men" proved to be more of Lang's robots, the "X-Sentinels," and once Wolverine sniffed out the fact they weren't human, the real X-Men made quick work of them.

Lang was defeated, and the space station, in the tradition of secret bases for master villains, was about to blow up. The X-Men and Corbeau hurried aboard the space shuttle and set off for Earth. But a massive solar storm was approaching that would lethally irradiate whoever was sitting in the damaged cockpit, steering the shuttle. Jean courageously volunteered, declaring that her telekinetic powers could protect her from the radiation for a short time—though not long enough to spare her life. Cyclops refused to let her go to her death, but Jean knocked him out telekinetically. Issue #100 ended with perhaps the most suspenseful cliffhanger in the X-Men's history, as Jean, steering the shuttle, was engulfed in the brilliant glow of the solar radiation, knowing this was the end.

But it wasn't. Issue #101 opened with the space shuttle crashing into Sheepshead Bay, off New York City's coast. The X-Men and Corbeau swam out into the bay, and suddenly Jean—or what looked like Jean—rose from beneath the water into the open air, garbed in a skin-tight costume no one had ever seen before. Around her sprung flames that shaped themselves into the form of a gigantic hawk. She passionately proclaimed she was no longer merely Jean Grey but the Phoenix, and then, almost immediately, she collapsed, and the other X-Men rushed her to a hospital.

Not until the following year would readers begin to learn what Jean's apparent transformation into the Phoenix meant. Phoenix was endowed with far greater psionic powers than Marvel Girl had ever possessed. This fit Claremont's agenda of making his female heroes the formidable equals of the men. But with Phoenix he went further: she could tap into the unlimited cosmic energies of the Phoenix Force, making her potentially the most powerful being on Earth.

This issue, #101, thus set up one of the greatest storylines in X-MEN history, or indeed the history of all of Marvel Comics, the Dark Phoenix Saga, culminating with Phoenix's suicide, which would have repercussions in Marvel stories into the 1990s. In time, the Marvel Chronicles will

cover this saga and why it proved to be so significant.

But let us return to X-MEN #101 in 1976. While Phoenix convalesced, Claremont and Cockrum sent the X-Men off to Ireland, the homeland of one of their members, Sean Cassidy, the Banshee. There, Sean's ancestral home, Cassidy Keep, had been taken over by his sinister cousin, the mutant Black Tom Cassidy, who made his first appearance in X-MEN #100. Worse, Black Tom had allied himself with the X-Men's longtime foe, the Juggernaut. The friendship and partnership between the Juggernaut and Black Tom gave a new dimension to Juggernaut's character, and the bond between them has persisted right into the present day.

In moving so quickly from outer space to Ireland, Claremont established an important modus operandi for the "new" X-MEN in the late 1970s. The series was continually on the move, ranging all over—and even off—the planet, pitting the heroes against a wide variety of adversaries in an endlessly changing series of colorful locations. One never knew quite what to expect from a new issue of X-MEN in these years, but it was always an enjoyable surprise.

The Cassidy Keep story would not be resolved until the 1977 issues. One reason why was that the December 1976 issue, #102, took an unexpected detour to Africa via flashback. In the course of the battle against the Juggernaut, the X-Man Storm suffered a severe attack of claustrophobia, and Claremont and Cockrum took the opportunity to explain the attack by revealing her origin at length.

Storm was Ororo Munroe, the daughter of an African-American photojournalist, David Munroe, and his African bride N'Dare, and, in fact, Storm had not been born in Africa, as readers had assumed, but in New York City. The Munroes went to Cairo, Egypt when Ororo was still a small child. Their apartment building was blown up in a terrorist attack, killing Ororo's parents outright, and leaving Ororo herself alive but buried under the rubble: hence, her enduring claustrophobia.

Claremont and Cockrum went on to show how Ororo grew up on the streets of Cairo, surviving by stealing, and eventually coming under the protection of master thief Achmed el-Gibar, who taught her to become the greatest pickpocket and lockpicker in Cairo.

As a teenager Ororo sensed her destiny calling from the South, and therefore trekked across the Sahara Desert by herself, finally reaching the Serengeti Plains, where she employed her newly emerged mutant powers to help the tribespeople there; in return,

they worshipped her as a goddess. And that is where Professor Xavier had found the adult Storm in GIANT-SIZE X-MEN #1.

Although at the readers did not suspect it, a clue to the future of THE X-MEN could be found in the pages of another series Claremont was writing, IRON FIST. On the splash page of issue #8 a mugging is in progress, and one of the victims is future X-MEN artist John Byrne, drawn by himself. Now a comics legend, the Claremont-Byrne team had actually begun the year before, with Iron Fist's final issue in MARVEL PREMIERE. Byrne had been working at Charlton Comics, and Claremont, enthusiastic about the Canadian artist's work, had been campaigning to get him assignments at Marvel. When Iron Fist left MARVEL PREMIERE for his own bimonthly comic book in October, 1975, Claremont and Byrne went with him. Through the course of 1976 they created multimillionaire Jeryn Hogarth, the future financial backer of Heroes for Hire, and continued to develop the team of female detectives Colleen Wing and Misty Knight. Colleen had been introduced earlier as the daughter of Iron Fist's mentor, Professor Lee Wing, and proved to be a martial artist of considerable skill herself. Oddly enough Misty Knight, her partner, had made her first appearance as an anonymous character in MARVEL TEAM-UP #1 four years earlier.

The "new" X-Men first met Marvel's signature character, Spider-Man, and made their first major guest appearance, as the co-stars of the first MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL. Oddly enough, this story is set after the Juggernaut storyline, which was still unfinished, since a fully recovered Phoenix participates in the action. Claremont and collaborator Bill Mantlo pitted the new mutant team against "the Lords of Light and Darkness," a group of human beings who had been transformed into avatars of the Hindu gods.

Now the Spider-Man empire was really beginning to expand. One companion book, MARVEL

TEAM-UP, was not enough; December 1976 was the cover date for the brand new series PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, written by prolific Spider-scripter Gerry Conway. Whereas MARVEL TEAM-UP paired Spidey with other Marvel heroes in self-contained stories, the new PETER PARKER book followed his ongoing solo adventures and subplots, just as AMAZING SPIDER-MAN did. (It was thus comparable to SUPERMAN and ACTION or BATMAN and DETECTIVE COMICS at DC.) SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, as it is known today, thus set the precedent for a new age in which a successful super hero series would keep generating companion titles. Eventually, as you all surely know, there would be an entire family of Spider-titles, as there are X-Men-related comics, and until recently, "families" of books about the Avengers and even the Punisher.

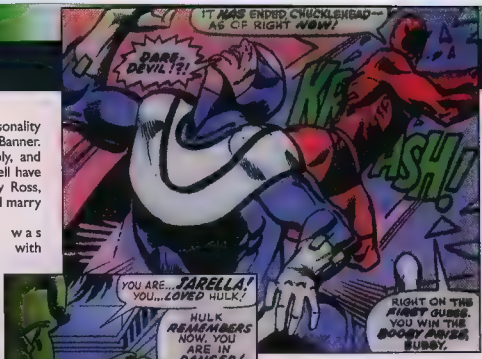
In 1976, though, the main developments in Spider-Man's life continued to occur only in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN. Despite the interruption by Spidey's tussle with a new costumed village, the Mirage, his friends Betty Brant and Ned Leeds were finally married in AMAZING #156. The story had a joyful ending, since no one then at Marvel had any idea Ned would eventually be framed for being the Hobgoblin and murdered.

In issues #161 and #162 Spider-Man teamed up with both the new X-Man Nightcrawler and the Punisher against a grotesquely scarred criminal named Jigsaw, who was destined to become the Punisher's most frequent and implacable adversary.

Issue #162 also saw the introduction of Dr. Marla Madison, a scientist whom J. Jonah Jameson commissioned to create a new Spider-Slayer robot. Yes, it was their mutual interest in crushing your friendly neighborhood web-slinger that first brought these two lovebirds together, and today Dr. Marla Madison is J. Jonah Jameson's wife.

Over in DAREDEVIL Writer Marv Wolfman and artist Bob Brown made perhaps their most impressive contribution to the series with issue #131, in which they introduced the Man Without Fear's deadliest enemy, Bullseye. Even then Bullseye was a ruthless criminal, with the incredible skill to use virtually any object he could throw as a lethal weapon; it would be Frank Miller, years later, who made it clear that Bullseye was also murderously insane. (Coincidentally, issue #131 also introduced Daily Bugle reporter Jake Conover, who returned to prominence in the recent HOBGOBLIN LIVES limited series.)

Even as one major character joined DAREDEVIL, another one left HULK permanently. It was the prominent writer and comics aficionado Harlan Ellison who had introduced Jarella into THE INCREDIBLE HULK. She was the green-skinned princess of a "microcosmic" world on which


IT WAS ENDED CHUCKLEHEAD— AS OF RIGHT NOW!
DARE DEVIL?!
KA
ASH!
YOU ARE...JARELLA! YOU...LOVED HULK?
HULK REMEMBERS NOW. YOU ARE IN DANGER!
RIGHT ON THE FIRST GUESS. YOU WIN THE BOOBY PRIZE, BUDDY.

the Hulk retained the personality and intelligence of Bruce Banner. She loved the Hulk deeply, and readers at the time may well have wondered if she, not Betty Ross, was the woman who should marry the tortured Banner.

The triangle was unintentionally resolved with INCREDIBLE HULK #205, in which the Hulk battled a decidedly forgettable opponent called the Crypto-Man. In the course of the fight, a wall began toppling towards a small child. Jarella, who had come to Earth from her "micro-world," pushed the child to safety only to be crushed by the collapsing wall herself. Jarella was dead, and, unlike so many deaths in Marvel continuity, this one was never reversed.

But Jarella was not supposed to be dead! Len Wein, who wrote the story, explained for years afterwards at conventions that he had not intended to kill her. Jarella, he said, was an alien, and he intended to demonstrate that even though the impact would have killed an Earthwoman, Jarella had a different physiology and could have been revived! Unfortunately, Wein left HULK before he could resurrect Jarella, and succeeding writers just assumed she was really dead, so dead she stayed! (Not only that, but Jarella ended up dying the same way Captain Stacy had in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN only a few years before!)

And had the Hulk/Banner loved Betty or Jarella more? The question was never resolved or even seriously investigated. It remains a mystery to this day, perhaps even to the Hulk himself.

Meanwhile, Wein set up a slowly unraveling mystery in the pages of THOR, where Odin, lord of Asgard, began acting ever more arbitrarily, more like a tyrant, and, in fact, totally out of character. That was indeed the case, because it turned out that Odin was being impersonated by one of Asgard's greatest enemies, the monster called the Mangog. Thor and his Asgardian allies, of course, ultimately managed to defeat the creature, but the question remained: where was the real Odin? The mystery would carry over into 1977, when Thor and his companions would embark on a quest to find him.

Once again, Thor could count on the goddess Sif as one of his allies. She had seemingly sacrificed her life force and her very existence to save the dying Jane Foster, the mortal woman Thor once had loved, but in issue #249 Foster vanished and Sif took her place. Perhaps the idea was that Sif and Jane would now be two sides of the same being, just as Thor and his mortal identity of Dr. Don Blake were. It was an experiment that would not last very long.

The 1976 THOR ANNUAL, written by Steve Englehart, depicted a war in ages past between the gods of Norse mythology, the Asgardians, and the Olympian gods, who had been worshipped by the peoples of ancient Greece and Rome. The war, though, was halted before it truly began, as the result of a secret meeting between the heads of their respective pantheons, Odin and Zeus. Strangely, this story, apparently set in the distant past, purported to recount Thor's first meeting with Hercules and the Olympian gods, and thereby contradicted Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's own tale of Thor's first encounter with Hercules in 1965's JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY ANNUAL #1. Once again, this is a question that has never been adequately resolved.

And 1976 saw another ending. Jim Starlin's brilliant WARLOCK series had failed to attract enough readers and came to an end with issue #15. But the curtain did not fall until Starlin had concluded Warlock's struggle against his own dark side incarnate, the Magus. Nor until after the saga of the original Star-Thief, a bedridden man with the enormous psionic power to extinguish the stars. Or even a charmingly funny story about Warlock's friend Pip the Troll and his encounter with the sensually named Miss Heater Delight. In what turned out to be the final issue, Warlock himself suffered a strange fate: his body expanded to gigantic size. Perhaps Starlin would have resolved the situation in the next issue, but abruptly the series halted.

One Marvel chartacter, though, was reaching his peak of success with incredible speed in 1976, enough to warrant his own presidential campaign, as we shall see next time.

—Peter Sanderson

MARVEL CHRONICLES 24

1976 PART 3:

THE FOWLEST PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF THEM ALL!

Among the real veteran Marvel readers out there, the new relaunch of **THE AVENGERS** not only moves the series into the future, but conjures fond memories of the past. Those longtime readers, after all, remember George Pérez's original run on **THE AVENGERS**, back in 1976, when he collaborated on it with Steve Englehart, writer of one of the finest periods in the book's history.

As the 1976 issues began, Englehart and Pérez had dispatched three of the Avengers—Thor, Hawkeye, and Moondragon—through time to the 19th century American West in search of the team's greatest enemy, the time lord Kang the Conqueror. There the three Avengers encountered some unexpected allies: five of Marvel Comics' Western heroes!

There were two of Marvel's longest running characters, Kid Colt and the Rawhide Kid, both of whom had unjustly been blamed for murders. Despite all their good deeds in stopping real criminals, both "Kids" had been branded as outlaws: in this, they were forebears of Marvel's super heroes of the 1960s, especially Spider-Man and the X-Men, who were young modern day "outlaws."

Then there was lawyer Matt Hawk, who was secretly the masked gunslinger known as the Two-Gun Kid: he was obviously a forerunner of Daredevil.

Not until after Marvel had launched its Silver Age of super heroes was the next character created. Originally he was known as the Ghost Rider, but after the first skull-headed cyclist by that name turned up, Marvel changed his name to the Night Rider. That didn't work either, since people at Marvel eventually realized that Ku Klux Klansmen were known as "night riders," so he was finally labeled the Phantom Rider, and that's the name that stuck.

Now if you think that's confusing, consider this: there have been four Phantom Riders, three in the past and their modern day counterpart! It's unclear whether the one in this storyline is the original or his second successor, who turned bad in another time travel tale Englehart spun years later in **WEST COAST AVENGERS**.

The Phantom Rider's gimmick was that thanks to his phosphorescent costume that made him glow in the dark, he convinced bad guys that he was a supernatural being out to avenge their crimes.

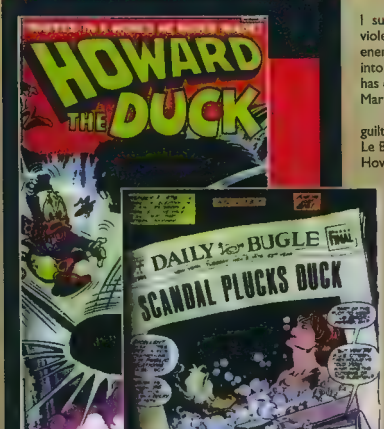
Finally, there was the Ringo Kid, a Marvel western hero who never achieved the popularity of the other four.

Meanwhile, in the present day, the other Avengers were investigating the Brand Corporation, a "think tank" run by the powerful Roxxon Oil Corporation. At this time Roxxon was controlled by a man named Hugh Jones, who had been kidnapped by the Serpent Squad in a storyline Englehart had written in **CAPTAIN AMERICA**. The Squad had forced Jones to wear the Serpent Crown, an ancient object of power that drew its mystical energies from the primeval serpent god Set (who was best known to Marvel readers as a deity worshipped by Thoth-Amon and other evil wizards in the pages of **CONAN**). The Squad members thought the Crown would merely reduce Jones to submission, but now, months later, Jones was still under its influence, and willingly so.

The Crown linked him with the man who wore its counterpart on a parallel Earth in an alternate dimension, who had become president of its United States. Since this was 1976 Englehart made that president Nelson Rockefeller, who was the longtime governor of New York State in the real, non-fictional world, who had repeatedly and unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for the presidency, and who was actually an admirable man, hardly a demon-worshipper!

Rockefeller is now long dead, and according to the rules of "Marvel time," it has only been at least ten years since the events depicted in the original **FANTASTIC FOUR #1**. So, as far as current continuity is concerned, it couldn't "really" have been Rockefeller in that story. George Olshevsky, the original compiler of Marvel's official indexes to various series, came up with the concept of "topical references" that are not "official" parts of continuity, like depictions of contemporary politicians. Rockefeller as president is one of these. So perhaps some of you might want to guess who Englehart's evil president would have been in terms of today's continuity.

Tagging along with the Avengers on this mission was some unexpected help in the form of another star of a Marvel comic outside the world of super heroes: Patsy Walker! Since the late 1940s Patsy had starred in her own comics about her life growing up with her best friend Hedy Wolfe and her boyfriend Buzz Baxter. Stan Lee and Jack Kirby even had Patsy and Hedy turn up in the crowd at Reed and Sue Richards' wedding. But as the



cliffhanger regarding that truly unique Marvel series, Stevbe Gerber's HOWARD THE DUCK? You may recall that the All-Night Party had persuaded H. T. D. to run for the presidency against Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford in 1976. But then in issue #8 (published in 1976 but cover-dated January 1977) a disgruntled bellboy took a photograph of Howard and his human girlfriend and campaign worker Beverly Switzler taking a bubble bath together. The scandal and public outrage sunk Howard's candidacy overnight. (Hmm, looks like presidential politics hasn't changed much in the intervening twenty-two years.)

In real life such a political disaster leads to theories that there was some conspiracy behind it. And in the world of comics, there really is a conspiracy! In issue #9 Howard tracked the conspiracy all the way to Canada where he confronted the mastermind behind it all: a crazed French Canadian separatist! (Yes, folks, back then the separatist movement in Quebec could be treated as a joke. And what this has to do with Howard's candidacy is inexplicable, but the absurdity of it all was Gerber's point.) Just as the United States makes the bald eagle its national symbol, so too this proud French Canadian chose one of Canada's noblest creatures for his emblem. And so he dressed up as a giant beaver, complete with big buck teeth, and called himself (what else) Le Beaver. (I suppose we should be grateful that when Roy Thomas and Len Wein decided to create a Canadian hero they chose a wolverine instead.) Holding Beverly hostage, Le Beaver demanded that Howard cross a log spanning the falls to fight him man-to-man (or duck-to-rodent, I suppose). In keeping with Gerber's attacks on violence in the series, Howard refused to play his enemy's game, and, blinded by fury, Le Beaver toppled into the falls himself. (Even more amazingly, no one has ever been tempted to bring him back! Here's one Marvel villain who has stayed dead—so far.)

Beverly was safe, but Howard was haunted by guilt over whether he had acted recklessly in defying Le Beaver. And so the next issue consisted entirely of Howard's dream, in which he confronted his inner demons in a surreal psychodrama. Before Howard came to terms with his problems, he even wound up in an insane asylum, where he briefly encountered, of all people, the rock group KISS, in a strange crossover with the KISS comic Gerber wrote for Marvel that same year!

But Howard still had not hit bottom. He did have a break from his downward spiral, as he and Beverly were spirited off to the mock-Arabian Nights kingdom of Bagmom (as opposed to Baghdad, you see) in that year's HTD ANNUAL. But while enjoying a cruise back to America on the S. S. Damned (making it the Voyage of the. . .well, you can figure it out), they were abducted by the man who would prove to be to Howard what Doctor Doom is to the Fantastic Four. Yes, issue #15 saw the introduction of that diabolical genetic engineer, that mad master of sonics, and former college nerd turned rock critic—the dreaded Doctor Bong. Whereas Doctor Doom wore a forbidding iron mask, Doctor Bong wore a giant bell on his head, and by striking it with the clapper he wore in place of one of his hands, he could create all sorts of sonic effects. (When he hit the bell on his head, it made a loud "BONG!" sound. Hence the name.)

Enamored since his formative nerd years of the beautiful Beverly, Doctor Bong was determined to take her from Howard. So he subjected HTD to a fate worse than death: he used genetic engineering to turn him into a human being, or, as Howard would say, a hairless ape. (And, I have to say, it was interesting to see what artist Gene Colan thought Howard would look like as a human.) Now, really, despite the absurdity of it all, this really did work as an affecting dark night of the soul for Howard; being deprived of his duckness was tantamount to losing his sense of self.

Meanwhile, no more than a small core of readers back in 1977 had the good taste to appreciate the work of the team that was about to change the face of super hero comics: Chris Claremont and John Byrne, working together on IRON FIST. Unfortunately, the book did not have enough readers to keep it going. So the majority of Marvel readers were not paying attention when in issue #14 Claremont and Byrne introduced a savage new Canadian villain who bore a strange—and intentional—resemblance to Wolverine and who went by the name Sabretooth. Byrne intended for Sabretooth to be Wolverine's father, but later writers had other ideas.

IRON FIST came to an end only one issue later, in #15, in which Iron Fist met, and in the time-honored

Marvel tradition, fought Wolverine before proper introductions were made. And so the series ended with a big party whose guests included Iron Fist, the "new" X-Men, and even Chris Claremont, John Byrne, and then presiding X-MEN artist Dave Cockrum, who all looked strangely alike back then: blond and bearded. This little gathering had a symbolic significance, as you shall see by the end of this installment.

As for Iron Fist, for three months he joined forces with the star of another book that could use sales help, and so Luke Cage's book became POWER MAN AND IRON FIST. Claremont and Byrne

did the first issue together, but each would soon leave the series: by now they were very busy elsewhere. But the POWER/FIST book, as it was nicknamed, continued for years, and has recently been revived as Marvel's new HEROES FOR HIRE series.

But now let us turn to another cliffhanger left over from our 1976 installments, namely the one in the newly revived X-MEN series, written by Claremont and drawn by Cockrum, but still only a bimonthly. (That's right, 1990s readers, back then many less popular titles only came out every two months, and back then THE X-MEN wasn't the best seller it is today, although it was starting to build momentum.)

When we left the X-Men in 1976, they were being held captive by the Banshee's evil cousin, Black Tom Cassidy and his partner, their old foe the Juggernaut, at the Banshee's ancestral castle in Ireland, Cassidy Keep. This story arc, by the way, marked Black Tom's very first appearance. Aided by leprechauns—believe it or not—the X-Men turned the tables on Black Tom, who plunged from a tower into the sea below, seemingly to his death (but, as we know, the X-Men had no such luck!). Proving the depth of his friendship for Black Tom, the Juggernaut dove in after him!

In the following issue, number #104, readers saw Muir Isle, off the coast of Scotland, and Dr. Moira MacTaggert's Mutant Research Center there for the very first time. This was also the "new" X-Men's first confrontation with Magneto, who exhibited a ferocity and power he had never shown before. Claremont and Cockrum had clearly upgraded him in power and attitude for this new generation of X-Men.

Magneto was tearing Moira MacTaggert's facility apart: he was livid with rage, and with good reason. The last time we had seen him was in a story Len Wein wrote for THE DEFENDERS, in which Magneto's own creation, Alpha the Ultimate Mutant, rebelled against him. Alpha ended up turning Magneto into a helpless, bawling baby, a particularly humiliating fate. And now we learned that the X-Men's leader Professor Xavier had scooped him up and turned him over to Moira for babysitting at Muir Isle.

But how could Xavier or Moira have predicted the intervention of Davan Shakari, alias Eric the Red, the alien Shi'ar operative under orders to stop the X-Men before they could aid the renegade Shi'ar princess Lilandra? Lilandra was fleeing to Earth to escape her brother, the mad Shi'ar emperor D'Ken Neramani. Shakari had decided the best way to rid himself of the X-Men was to send the team's greatest enemy against them. Hence, Shakari had restored Magneto to adulthood, though making him younger than he had been before being turned into a baby. (That is why Magneto seems so young despite the fact that, as we later learned, he grew up in the 1940s.)

The ensuing battle was hardly a great victory for the new, still rather inexperienced team of X-Men: basically, they succeeded simply in avoiding being killed until Magneto decided to make his exit. None of them noticed that during the melee the cell of a being known as "Mutant X" had been damaged, enabling him to escape. This would prove in later issues to be Moira's son Proteus, yet another deadly opponent for the X-Men.

For several issues Professor Xavier had sensed Lilandra's approach in the form of nightmarish dreams about battles she fought in space against her pursuers. Finally, though, they came face to face on Earth, while Shakari had duped Firelord, a former herald of Galactus, into aiding him. Phoenix went into action against Firelord, and her ability to match his cosmic power demonstrated to the readers just how powerful Jean Grey had become. (Let me remind you that at the time, even though the readers, the X-Men, and even Claremont and Cockrum, believed that this Phoenix was a transformed Jean Grey, a founding member of the X-Men, it would be revealed years later that this was a sentient cosmic entity called the Phoenix Force that had duplicated Jean's physical form. No wonder she could hold off a herald of Galactus!)

In the midst of the fray Shakari captured Lilandra and plunged with her through a waiting stargate that, for all the X-Men knew, could have transported them anywhere in the universe. Phoenix declared that she could reopen the stargate, and the X-Men were bent on going through and rescuing the princess. (Looks as if Claremont and Lucas were coincidentally treading similar creative paths that year!) We were on the verge of the very first outer space epic adventure in

the history of the X-Men, old or new. And then there was a fill-in issue.

What's a fill-in, you new readers ask? Every so often back in the 70's and 80's, when the creative team could not finish the next issue of a book in time, Marvel would have to substitute an inventory story, often done by different creators, and almost always unconnected with the ongoing storylines.

The fill-in in issue #106, though, is particularly interesting from the vantage point of the 1990s. Plotted by Bill Mantlo and scripted by Claremont, it is a flashback to a recent struggle by the X-Men against a mysterious opponent who proves to be the evil side of Xavier's own personality, manifested in astral form. Mantlo even brought this evil version of Xavier back years later in the X-MEN/MICRONAUTS limited series, dubbing the astral villain "the Entity." Reading this description of the Entity, today's readers should immediately realize that this was the beginning of the menace called Onslaught! Whether or not Onslaught's creators consciously remembered the Entity stories I can not say; perhaps it is merely coincidence that writers two decades apart came up with similar ideas. But from a historical point of view, judging the stories alone and not the authors' intentions, it certainly seems as if the Entity was the creature that would one day turn into the even more powerful evil version of Xavier we know as Onslaught.

With issue #107 Claremont, Cockrum, and the regular storyline were back. Having traveled through the stargate, the X-Men found themselves on an alien world, confronted not only by D'Ken himself, with Lilandra his prisoner, but by D'Ken's elite squad of super-powered warriors, the Imperial Guard. It was in this issue that most of the familiar Imperial Guardsmen were introduced, notably Gladiator and Fang. The latter's costume Wolverine confiscated after his own was destroyed in the ensuing battle between the Guardsmen and X-Men. The Imperial Guard were in part a colossal in-joke, since most of them bore vague but noticeable resemblances to members of a certain futuristic super hero club Dave Cockrum had made his reputation drawing over at the Distinguished Competion.

The X-Men were considerably outnumbered by this veritable legion of opponents, but the cavalry came to the rescue in the surprising form of the Starjammers, a band of good-hearted space pirates, led by a human named Corsair, who seemed to be a latter-day version of Errol Flynn in a swashbuckling pirate movie from thec 1930s. We would not learn for another issue that Corsair, by what still seems an extraordinary coincidence, was actually Christopher Summers, the long-thought-dead father of Cyclops.

Together the X-Men and Starjammers overpower the Guardsmen. But it was too late: D'Ken played his trump card. His scheme was to unleash the power of the M'Kraan Crystal, an entity that somehow imprisoned an entire galaxy of super-heavy neutron stars. If the immense gravitational forces of the neutron galaxy were released, they would destroy the universe. As issue #108 ends the Crystal is activated by the alignment of nine "Death Stars" (Hey, wait—that sounds familiar!) and the entire universe momentarily blinks out of existence! If the Crystal is not stopped, the universe will come to a permanent end.

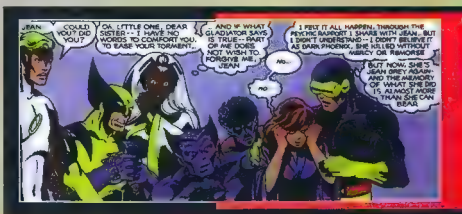
And at this climactic moment, Dave Cockrum leaves the series! Thanks to the book's growing success, Marvel wanted X-MEN to go monthly soon, and at that time Cockrum was not comfortable working on a monthly schedule. And so the penciling post on X-MEN was turned over to an artist who had already been collaborating with Claremont elsewhere, had already drawn the X-Men in the last issue of IRON FIST, and who really wanted the job. When the story resumed in issue #108, it was John Byrne who was drawing the series.

And the resolution was astounding, as Phoenix drew upon not only all of her own power but also upon Jean Grey's spiritual bonds with her fellow X-Men to rebuild the energy matrix within the Crystal, thereby re-imprisoning the neutron galaxy and the forces that threatened to destroy the cosmos. Phoenix had served as a force for life, saving the entire universe. Readers could hardly suspect that within a few years the balance would shift, and she would become Dark Phoenix, a force for universal destruction.

But that was still in the future. For now, happiness reigned. D'Ken was deposed, and the X-Men and Lilandra returned safely to Earth. While waiting for the Shi'ar government to judge her claims to the throne, Lilandra would have to remain on Earth, but this was hardly a problem, since she and Xavier were falling in love with each other.

And now that Chris Claremont and John Byrne were teamed up on the series, THE X-MEN was about to reach new heights. They would lay the groundwork that would make THE X-MEN the comic business's best-selling title and give rise to a whole family of Marvel mutant books. The Claremont-Byrne X-MEN would influence virtually every super hero team that followed, right up through the present day. Dividing modern comics history into separate periods is a difficult thing to do. But clearly the Claremont-Byrne X-MEN marked the beginning of something new: it would be the most influential run of a Marvel title since Stan Lee's classic work of the 1960s.

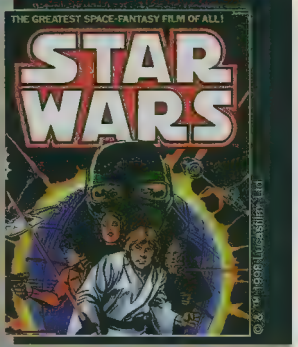
—Peter Sanderson


JEAN:
COULD YOU? DID YOU?
OH, LITTLE ONE, DEAR SISTER -- I HAVE NO WORDS TO COMFORT YOU. NO EASE YOUR TORMENT.
AND W' WHAT GLADIATOR SAYS IS TRUE -- PART OF ME DOES NOT WISH TO FORGIVE ME, JEAN.
I FELT IT ALL, HAPPEN, THROUGH THE PSYCHIC RAPPORT I SHARE WITH JEAN... BUT I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND -- I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT AS DARK PHOENIX, SHE KILLED WITHOUT MERCY OR REMORSE
NO...
NO
BUT NOW, SHE'S JEAN GREY AGAIN, AND THE MEMORY OF WHAT SHE DID IS, AGAIN, TOO MUCH TRAUMA SHE CAN BEAR

1977

PART 1:

THE FORCE IS WITH MARVEL



Imagine yourself back twenty-one years ago. Jimmy Carter was president. Disco music had reached its peak. And moviegoers did not expect the summer to be filled with blockbuster action-adventure movies. (Oh, sure, there was that Jaws movie two years back, but that was regarded as an anomaly.) People didn't go to westerns or war movies or detective thrillers any more, and except for James Bond, the spy movie was dead. And the Conventional Wisdom, as everybody knew, was that science fiction movies don't make big money. They only attracted a small niche audience, and that was why they had mostly been poorly done, low budget B-movies since the 1950s. (Oh, yeah, there was that 2001 thing back in the 1960s. But that was an anomaly.)

Moreover, the Conventional Wisdom, as everybody in the comics industry knew, was that science fiction comics don't make money. (Oh, of course, there were those EC comics in the 1950s. But they were anomalies.)

So what a surprise it was when in the spring of 1977 Marvel launched this new science fiction series based on this movie that hadn't even come out yet, called Star Wars. It seemed that its director and writer, George Lucas, had gotten together with Marvel writer/editor Roy Thomas and persuaded him that this would be a really good movie and would make a really good comic book as well. So Roy managed to persuade the Powers That Be at Marvel to take a chance on this untested property practically no one else had heard of, and as a result Marvel did a six-part adaptation of the movie. Roy wrote the series, and the pencils were by future star artist Howard Chaykin, then at the beginning of his career. The first few issues came out before the movie did, and probably a good number of Marvel fans read them and thought, hmm, you know, this is pretty good. I know I liked them enough to make sure I went to the movie on opening day.

And, of course, you all know what happened to "Star Wars" the movie from then on. Everybody had to change their Conventional Wisdom about science fiction movies really fast.

The tremendous success of the movie meant that Marvel continued doing the STAR WARS comic after the six-part adaptation of the movie came to an end. Perceptively, Roy Thomas realized how George Lucas blended elements from old movies and even from japanese culture into his Star Wars mythos. So the first original story arc for the Star Wars comic was a variation on the Japanese director Akira Kurosawa's The Seven Samurai, which had later been remade as the western The Magnificent Seven. Perhaps knowing of Lucas's affection for the work of animation director Chuck Jones, Roy even put a talking rabbit-like alien reminiscent of Bugs Bunny in the story. It is said that the Lucasfilm people did not care much for this storyline, however.

In any event, Roy Thomas soon left the series, being busy as the sole writer of Marvel's various CONAN projects as well as THE INVADERS, as did Howard Chaykin But, proving that science fiction comics could indeed be big sellers, Marvel kept on publishing STAR WARS comics through the rest of the 1970s and well into the 1980s. Perhaps the most memorable of these were the special adaptations of The Empire Strikes Back and Return of the Jedi, written by Archie Goodwin and illustrated by Al Williamson, who had first come to fame drawing science fiction stories for EC. (See? They weren't such an exception, after all.)

The STAR WARS comic points to one of Marvel's shining virtues in the 1970s. There are those who think of the 1970s as a low point for Marvel. Certainly it would be difficult to equal the genuine greatness of the work of Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, and the rest in the 1960s that still stands as the artistic foundation of Marvel and, indirectly, of all American action-adventure comics that followed. And it is likewise true that a number of Marvel's core series went through a period of creative doldrums through much of the 1970s. But the Marvel of the 1970s was full of young talented people who were bursting with creative energy and eager to push the comics artform, as Stan and Jack and the others had redefined it, into new directions. STAR WARS the comic was a gamble by Roy Thomas and by Marvel that paid off handsomely, artistically and financially, just as CONAN had earlier in the decade. Marvel was the cutting edge, getting in on the ground floor of major popular culture phenomena.

And speaking of experimentation in comics, what, you ask, became of last month's

super hero genre took over comics, genres like Westerns and "girls' comics" fell by the wayside; Englehart had decided to reintroduce Patsy and Buzz as husband and wife supporting players in his short-lived **BEAST** series in **AMAZING ADVENTURES**. But Buzz, now a military man, had turned corrupt and was now in league with Hugh Jones and his multidimensional conspiracy.

(Later stories established that the Patsy in the super hero comics was the daughter of the writer of the old **PATSY WALKER** comics, who had named her characters after her daughter and her friends. The current Patsy eventually married, of all people, Daimon Hellstrom, back when he was depicted as a good guy, not the ruler of hell. In the recent **HELLSTORM** series Patsy was seemingly killed, which seems a cruel and inappropriate fate for the spunky and delightful heroine of generations of girls who read comics!)

But back to happier times for Patsy: estranged from Buzz, she turned up at Avengers Mansion demanding that the Beast keep his promise to make her into a super hero. And weirdly enough, Patsy's wish came true! As the Avengers were poking around a Brand building, Patsy came across a costume once worn by the 1970s super heroine called the Cat (who is now known as Tigra). Patsy put it on and discovered that it somehow amplified her athletic abilities (or so she thought), and she renamed herself the Hellcat.

Patsy was soon in for her trial by fire. To combat the Avengers, Jones sent for the super heroes who aided the President of the alternate Earth: the Squadron Supreme, that team who seem oddly reminiscent of another famous team of heroes you may have heard of. Englehart and Perez even added a new member, the amphibious Amphibion. Rockefeller had used the Serpent Crown's power to put the Squadron under his mental control, and Jones had them battle the Avengers, first on the Avengers' Earth and then on their own. Ultimately, the Avengers captured Rockefeller's Crown and brought it back to their own Earth, and the Squadron regained their free will and turned against their evil president.

And back in the past, Hawkeye, Thor, and Moondragon defeated Kang, who seemingly perished before their eyes, along with his future self, Immortus. But Immortus, as always, was playing his mind games with the Avengers: neither Kang nor Immortus was truly gone for good.

The time- and dimension-traveling teams of Avengers were reunited in time for their 150th issue and for a changing of the guard in more ways than one. The Avengers lineup has continually been in flux throughout its history, and now Thor, Hawkeye, and Moondragon, as well as newly appointed Avenger Hellcat, went on reserve status, while the Beast was granted full active membership. Unexpectedly, Steve Englehart abruptly left both the series and Marvel, and Gerry Conway took over as writer.

But the biggest surprise arrived in a crate delivered to Avengers Mansion during the press conference to announce the lineup changes. Out burst Wonder Man, the Avengers' one-time ally who had long been thought to be dead. He seemed to be under a spell, and so he was. His brother, the Grim Reaper, a longtime Avengers enemy, had hired the Black Talon, a villainous voodoo priest, to resurrect him as a kind of zombie. Oddly, without any real explanation, Wonder Man managed to shake off the spell over the next few issues, regained his free will, and became an active member of the Avengers.

One of the most creative writers at Marvel in the 1970s, Steve Englehart had made his mark on several other titles that year before he left.

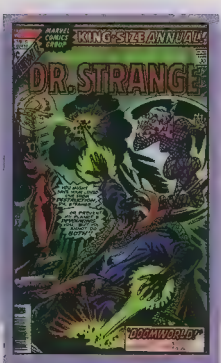
You can tell from the very name of **SUPER-VILLAIN TEAM-UP** that it was one of Marvel's more unusual ideas for a series back in the 1970s. The leads were Doctor Doom, Marvel's greatest super-villain, and the Sub-Mariner, whose villainous days were long behind him, but whose own series had been cancelled and, in effect, needed a place to stay.

It was here that Steve Englehart created a new masked vigilante, the Shroud. It is hard to say what exactly Englehart had in mind when he invented this character. Much of his origin, his dark costume, and his mission to fight crime made him a Marvel version of Batman, but he was blind like Daredevil. The Shroud lacked DD's super-senses but could "see" through mystical, mental means. In the course of his origin, the Shroud also seemed to have stumbled upon the same mysterious order of monks who had forged Doctor Doom's armor, but why Englehart threw that into the mix is hard to say.

My most memorable moment in the series that year came when the Fantastic Four once again tried to fight Doom only to be stopped by then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who informed them that the United States had just signed a non-interference treaty with Doom's kingdom of Latveria!

Englehart's final issues of **DOCTOR STRANGE** did not match his peak on the previous two years of the series, but nonetheless demonstrated so much creativity that his sudden departure after issue #18 came as a shock.

The year began with a continuation of a storyline in which Doctor Strange traveled through literal nightmare worlds, in one of which he was forced back into his past as an alcoholic derelict. Of course, it



was his old enemy Nightmare who was to blame, having taken Eternity, the sentience of the cosmos, prisoner, enabling him to restructure reality at will.

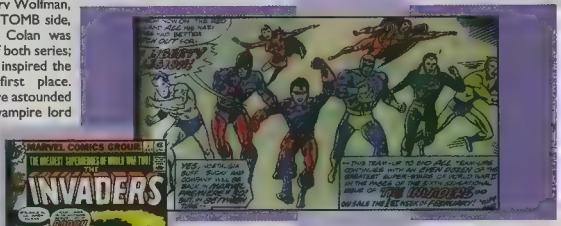
Next came the memorable crossover with **TOMB OF DRACULA** #44; Marv Wolfman, of course, wrote the TOMB side, and the great Gene Colan was already the penciler of both series; perhaps that fact had inspired the crossover in the first place. Readers no doubt were astounded not only to see the vampire lord murder Doctor Strange, but to then witness Strange rise again as a vampire himself. The Sorcerer Supreme succeeded in curing himself and thought by the story's end he had obliterated Dracula from existence. But Strange was wrong, and the new war between himself and the Count would resume in years to come.

In his final issues Englehart sent Doctor Strange and his partner Clea back in time to trace "The Occult History of America," founded on the historical fact that a number of key figures in American history were members of the secret order of Freemasons. Keep in mind this was in 1976, and hence was yet another bicentennial-themed storyline.

First Doc and Clea encountered the English explorer Sir Francis Drake in the 17th century. Moving ahead a hundred years they then met Benjamin Franklin, who, as history notes, was quite the ladies' man and proved it by seducing Clea!

What repercussions did Englehart intend for Clea's infidelity? Exactly what mystical knowledge and abilities did some of the Founding Fathers—or, at least, their Marvel Universe counterparts— have? Where was all of this leading?

It seems we will never know. Englehart quit the series and Marvel due to behind-the-scenes difficulties, and his successors swiftly dumped the American history angle and headed off in a new story direction. Even when Englehart returned to Marvel in the 1980s, though he picked up some of his old storylines, like the saga of Mantis, he did not go back to this one. Ah, well, perhaps if Steve ever returns again, someone can prevail upon him to finally reveal what Franklin was up to. (Hmm, makes you wonder if that business with the kite in the electrical storm was some sort of ritual, doesn't it?)



Those among you who might wonder what the events of twenty-two years ago have to do with today's comics might do well to consider this. 1976 saw the publication of the first **DOCTOR STRANGE ANNUAL**, plotted and gorgeously illustrated by P. Craig Russell, otherwise known as the artist on Marvel's **KILLRAVEN** series (then still written by Don McGregor and appearing in **AMAZING ADVENTURES**). Russell was dissatisfied with the scripting of the annual, but only last year got his chance to redo the entire story in a special bookshelf format entitled "What Disturbs You, Stephen Strange?" So you readers never know when some "obscure" but classic tale from the past will resurface to affect Marvel's present.

The year before, Roy Thomas and the great comic strip artist Frank Robbins had launched a new series about the Avengers' counterpart in World War II: **THE INVADERS**, starring Captain America, Bucky, Sub-Mariner, the original Human Torch, and his partner Toro. In a three-part story that crossed over into **MARVEL PREMIERE** #29, Thomas gathered another batch of characters Marvel published in the 1940s into another team intended to guard the home front: the Liberty Legion. The lineup included two creations of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby—the Blue Diamond and the Red Raven—two early creations of Stan Lee's—Jack Frost and the Whizzer—plus the Patriot, the Thin Man, and Miss America.

Thomas no doubt decided that if World War II had costumed heroes, then why shouldn't there have been some in World War I? And so, **INVADERS** #7 introduced Lord Falsworth, who was formerly Britain's costumed agent of World War II, the original Union Jack. That same issue introduced two more important characters. One was Union Jack's nemesis, the Nazi vampire Baron Blood, the most famous of the villains created in **THE INVADERS**. And then there was Falsworth's daughter Jacqueline, who, through a strange turn of events, became endowed with superhuman speed; it would not be till the next year's issues, though, that she would become the first female Invader, Spitfire.

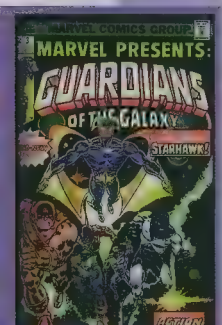
And there was so much more in the Marvel of 1976! True, the horror line had been cut back. Morbius had taken over from Man-Thing in FEAR, but it was cancelled in 1975, along with **THE FRANKENSTEIN MONSTER**, which had brought Mary Shelley's creation into the present day. But the team of Marv Wolfman, Gene Colan, and Tom Palmer were still creating classics every month in **TOMB OF DRACULA**, the Johnny Blaze version of Ghost Rider kept cycling through his own series, while writer Doug Moench

made **WEREWOLF BY NIGHT** his own. A supposed villain he co-created for that series turned hero when Moon Knight received his first solo story in **MARVEL PREMIERE** #28.

Roy Thomas and John Buscema continued their masterful run on **CONAN THE BARBARIAN**, while adapting Robert E. Howard tales set later in Conan's life in the black and white **SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN**. Another savage hero, Ka-Zar, was now the title character in his own comic book. And another great pulp magazine hero, Doc Savage, was now starring in book-length adventures in his own black and white magazine.

POWER MAN was still going strong, and over in **JUNGLE ACTION** writer Don McGregor started a then-controversial storyline about the Black Panther's struggle against the Ku Klux Klan.

In the realm of science fiction **ASTOUNDING TALES** and its series about the original Deathlok, set in the far future of (gasp!) 1985, came to an end, but the Guardians of the Galaxy, a super-team based in the much more safely far off thirtieth century, finally got their own series starting in **MARVEL PRESENTS** #3. A dying alien warrior bestowed his superhuman powers on a Long Island teenager named Richard Rory in the first issue of **THE MAN CALLED NOVA** by Marv Wolfman and Sal Buscema. And Marvel even had a black and white **PLANET OF THE APES** magazine showcasing brilliant artwork by Mike Ploog and Tom Sutton.



Amidst all the richness of the stories and artwork that year, there was one writer's work that stood out for its unequaled strangeness, unpredictability, humor, and incisive commentary, and that was Steve Gerber.

Gerber wrapped up his stint on **THE DEFENDERS** with some of his oddest—and most characteristic—storylines yet. He had already reintroduced the Headmen, a trio of villains, two of whom had unusual heads indeed. The human head of the leader, the surgeon Dr. Arthur Nagan, had been transplanted onto a gorilla's body. They gained a new member who was the strangest of all: Ruby Thursday (whose name was an allusion to a Beatles song), an otherwise attractive woman whose head was an artificial red globe that could alter its shape!

The highlight of Gerber's work at Marvel, though, was the unforgettable **HOWARD THE DUCK** series. Forget the movie; forget even Howard's more recent comics appearances. None of them capture the sheer brilliance of this original run of stories. A talking duck "trapped in a world he never made," Howard somehow embodied the universal experience of struggling against a world filled with violence, stupidity, and just plain nonsense. In the very first issue he felt enough despair to attempt suicide. But he didn't go through with it: Howard was too full of life, and armed with his low tolerance for fools and his biting wit, he acted for us all in fighting back, if only verbally.

HOWARD's first two issues were drawn by Frank Brunner, who had already demonstrated in **DOCTOR STRANGE** his amazing ability to make the surreal look real. The best **HOWARD** artists, including Gene Colan, who took over with issue #4, somehow made this refugee from a funny animal cartoon blend seamlessly into the more realistically drawn world of the Marvel Universe.

Initially **HOWARD** parodied other comics genres: the first issue, for example, went after sword and sorcery, as Howard scaled a tower made of credit cards, donned a Conan-like costume, and did battle with Pro-Rata, a capitalist wizard who sought to use magic and accounting techniques to dominate the universe.

In the course of such a story, there must be a scantily clad damsel in distress, and Howard found just such a captive: artist's model Beverly Switzler, destined to become his true love. Beverly became the book's co-star, and the odd but loving rapport between this short-tempered waterfowl and this sweet, beautiful human woman became a surprisingly affecting symbol for love triumphing over even the greatest of differences.

Howard soon found himself battling the dreaded Space Turnip, becoming a "Master of Quak Fu," and meeting a giant, living Gingerbread Man. But Gerber quickly moved beyond genre parodies to satiric, and sometimes deadly serious, social commentary. The "Quak Fu" story in issue #3 was actually an attack on gang violence, long before it became a regular subject in the news media, and even a critique on glamorizing violence in entertainment, surely a surprising topic to tackle in a comic book! The Gingerbread Man was only one element of a story that also went after cult leader Reverend Joon Moon Yuc and his Yucchies, continuing Gerber's satiric assault from **DEFENDERS.**

It was 1976, the bicentennial year, Howard was the talk of fandom, and the demand could not be denied: Howard the Duck ran for president! Even before #7, the election issue, came out, fans in the know were wearing their "Get Down America!" campaign buttons proudly. (You see, you get down—feathers—from a duck, get it?) Backed by the All-Night Party, faced with opponents as lame as Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter, Howard clearly should have won.

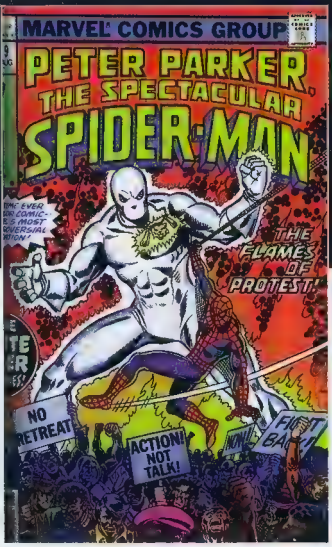
But then scandal struck. A malcontent bellboy snapped a picture of Howard taking a bubble bath with campaign worker Beverly Switzler. Horrified at this interspecies romance, the American public turned its back on Howard's candidacy.

Oliver Stone would have smelled a rat, and he would have been right. But to learn the identity and motives of the rodent behind this conspiracy against the American electorate. . .you'll have to wait till our next column, on 1977.

—Peter Sanderson

MARVEL CHRONICLES 1977 PART 2:

It seems strange to end the MARVEL CHRONICLES series with 1977, because for many series it was not the most memorable of years. But as we look at a few key series in that year, 1977 may look like as good a point as any with which to end our story. Let's go through the 1977 Marvel books we haven't covered yet, and you'll see what I mean.



This was the first full year that Spider-Man starred in three books, not one. In the flagship title, AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, issue #166 featured one of those it-had-to-happen-sometime scenarios, in which Spidey's two reptilian adversaries—the Lizard and newcomer Stegron the Dinosaur Man—finally met and fought, although to little real purpose. The following issue introduced the year's one long-running new supporting character for Spider-Man, the Will o'the Wisp, a scientist who fell victim to an accident that weakened his molecular structure, but also endowed him with the ability to become intangible at will.

And then in #172 the Rocket Racer skated into Spider-Man's life. He was a young African-American inventor of a computer-controlled, rocket-powered skateboard—no, really—who originally used it for crime, but has kept resurfacing over the years as an occasional costumed crimefighter. Marvel writers keep coming up with characters on skates whom we're supposed to take seriously, going all the way back to Stan equipping Iron Man's boots with retractable roller skate wheels. Then there were Gaard, and the Dazzler, and even the skateboard Night Thrasher used in his early exploits, which somehow did not fit his grim avenger image. I suppose it's a tribute to Jack Kirby's genius that he made us take an alien on a flying surfboard seriously.

1977 was the first full year of Spidey's new companion series, originally titled PETER PARKER, THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN. This was by far the longest running Marvel super hero comic book introduced in the 1970s; only recently did SPECTACULAR finally bite the dust. In two of the 1977 issues Spider-Man teamed up with Marvel's first Latino super hero, Hector Ayala, the White Tiger. Hector was actually the heir of a team of martial artists, the Sons of the Tiger, who had appeared in Marvel's black and white magazine DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU. He had gotten hold of the enchanted amulets that enhanced the Sons' battle prowess; by wearing all three at once he became a master of the martial arts.

The best Spider-Man series of 1977, though, was surely MARVEL TEAM-UP, thanks to the talents of that landmark future X-MEN team Chris Claremont and John Byrne. Byrne came aboard first, drawing Bill Mantlo's storyline that brought Spider-Man and the Hulk together with one of Marvel's oddest heroes, Woodgod, who had debuted in MARVEL PREMIERE #31. He was a genetically engineered being who resembled a satyr from Greek mythology: a man with horns and lower half of a goat's body; originally unable to talk, Woodgod was another of Marvel's many characters who are unjustly persecuted for being different. This storyline ended up in issue #55 taking Spider-Man all the way to the moon, where he encountered Adam Warlock, whose series had been recently cancelled. This issue introduced the Gardener, another of the immortal, virtually omnipotent beings obsessed by a certain field of endeavor who would eventually be designated as the Elders of the Universe.

DID YOU SEE HOW EASILY I BEAT THEM? GRAVITY IS THE TRUE FUNDAMENTAL FORCE--!
--AND I, GRAVITON, AM ITS MASTER! UHDY!
SHE CAN'T HEAR YOU, SIR!

Byrne left TEAM-UP with that issue, but he returned in issue #59 to begin his memorable partnership with Chris Claremont on the title, starting with a two-parter teaming Spider-Man with the classic Marvel duo of Henry Pym, then in his Yellowjacket identity, and the Wasp. This was followed by Spidey's team-up with new Marvel star Ms. Marvel against the Super-Skrull and a two-parter resolving a leftover storyline from the just cancelled IRON FIST series, as the Fist finally had a showdown with his rival, Steel Serpent.

The best of the Claremont/Byrne TEAM-UPS would come the following year, though, as Spider-Man and Thor took on the gigantic Living Monolith, and the unprecedented meeting of Spider-Man and Red Sonja, whose spirit briefly usurped the body of his future wife Mary Jane Watson!

Jim Shooter took over writing THE AVENGERS in 1977 after Gerry Conway left the title. In issue #158 Shooter introduced a new villain, Graviton, who controlled the force of gravity. In a story drawn by George Pérez Shooter brought back Henry Pym's creation, the sinister robot Ultron, whose intense Oedipal complex drove him to try to kill his "father," Pym. Shooter realized it would have another effect as well, and so had Ultron capture Pym's wife, the Wasp, and use her life force to animate the robot he intended to be his mate, Jocasta, who has repeatedly turned up over the years since then.

His most significant story that year, however, was a three-parter drawn by the now omnipresent John Byrne, in which longtime Avengers villain Count Nefaria made himself virtually unstoppable by draining into himself the superhuman powers of three other enemies of the team: the Living Laser, the super-fast Whirlwind, and the superhumanly strong Power Man. This "Power Man," by the way, was not Luke Cage but the original possessor of the name, the character THUNDERBOLTS readers know today as Atlas. This story set a chain of unexpected events in motion: Nefaria's new powers were too much for his human body, leaving him a burnt-out shell.

Jim Starlin wound up the saga of Adam Warlock (for the next decade and a half, anyway) in the 1977 annuals for AVENGERS and MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE. In the first the Avengers join forces with the two Marvel heroes with whom Starlin is still most identified, Warlock and Captain Mar-Vell, against his most famous villainous creation, Thanos. Warlock "dies" in the course of the battle, but his spirit lives on within a mystical world inside the Soul Gem he wore. There Warlock finds a kind of heaven alongside the spirits of his friends and allies Gamora and Pip the Troll.

The tale continued in the MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL, which brought the Thing and Spider-Man into the fray, while affectingly portraying Spider-Man's bewilderment at finding himself in a battle against aliens in outer space, a situation far removed from his normal milieu. This saga climaxes with Warlock's brief return from the dead long enough to transform Thanos into a living but immobile statue.

And thus the saga of Warlock and Thanos came at last to an end. Perhaps we should be surprised in retrospect that these characters did not get revived by other writers within a year or two. But the Marvel writers and editors of that time respected Starlin's work and let his resolution of the tale of these characters stand. It was not until the early 1990s, when Starlin returned to Marvel, that these characters were finally resurrected under his auspices.

Steve Gerber's stint on THE DEFENDERS was unique and inimitable in its intelligent brand of sheer strangeness. But the team of David Anthony Kraft and Keith Giffen took the series in unusual directions of their own. They brought back Scorpio, one of the foremost creations of Jim Steranko in his classic run on NICK FURY, AGENT OF SHIELD. Long believed to be dead, Scorpio had been revealed after Steranko left Marvel to have been Fury's own younger brother Jake turned criminal. In the hands of Kraft and Giffen the now unmasked Scorpio became a study in middle-aged burnout, a younger brother who had failed to equal his brother and now was lost in a fantasy world of his own creation, populated by androids. One android was even a replica of Nick, who developed a genuine sympathy for his alcoholic master. Failing even at crime, Jake finally committed suicide, although, as Marvel readers should expect, this would not be the end of Scorpio: Steve Englehart would revive him in android form in the 1980s.

Jim Starlin also wrote DOCTOR STRANGE in 1977, spinning a tale about the Creators, wizards who sought to take the places and forms of the stars in the heavens. Although this has seldom been noted in the following years, this storyline established that at least some stars in the Marvel Universe are intelligent beings. (After all, if we can have Ego the Living Planet, why not?) In fact, we even met one of them in issue #22, Apalla, Queen of the Sun, a star who had taken human form. (In the 1980s we would also meet Cloud, a girl who turned out to be an entire nebula in the form of a teenage girl!)

FANTASTIC FOUR #178 began the year with a story dear to the hearts of Marvel VISION'S "Silliest Moments" fans, the tale in which the criminal Frightful Four, their ranks reduced to a mere frightful three, took over the Fantastic Four's Baxter Building headquarters and then placed an ad in the newspaper asking potential new members to go there to audition. I'm sorry, if I was a super-villain and had taken over the Baxter Building, I would not place an ad telling the police and all of New York's super heroes where I was. And do we really believe that unemployed super-villains sit home and read the want ads?

Things picked up in issues #185 and #186 in the hands of Len Wein and George Pérez, who took the Fantastic Four and the readers off to New Salem, a hidden town populated by witches and warlocks who had settled there long ago to escape persecution. This was where Agatha Harkness, Franklin's nanny, came from, and in this tale she and the FF faced off against her malevolent son, the devilishly named Nicholas Scratch, and his minions, Salem's Seven.

Little of lasting importance happened in the Hulk's regular comic in 1977, unless someday someone decides to bring back Bruce Banner's 1970s long-forgotten girlfriend, the seasonally named April Sommers. True, we did first meet the villainous Constrictor in issue #212, although he has faded into obscurity of late. And issues #212 and #213 guest-starred the Jack of Hearts, a new super hero from the pages of DEADLY HANDS OF KUNG FU, who nevertheless had nothing to do with martial arts. After being doused in "zero fluid" he mutated into a being who had to wear a suit of armor to contain the tremendous energies his body generated. (What has never been explained is what all this has to do with the playing card he's named after.) Jack has more recently shown up in SILVER SURFER, and zero fluid will soon play a new role in ALPHA FLIGHT.

Over in the HULK ANNUAL the Enclave, the organization of scientists who created "Him," later known as Adam Warlock, genetically engineered a new creation, Paragon, who would later on take female form and be known as (what else?) "Her."

But the real news for Hulk fans that year was the debut of a new black and white magazine, entitled THE RAMPAGING HULK, with new stories written by Doug Moench and superbly illustrated by Walt Simonson. The inspired gimmick was that these stories were set in the gap between the cancellation of the Hulk's original six-issue series and his return in TALES TO ASTONISH. This meant that instead of the childlike brutish Hulk with which 1970s readers were familiar, Moench and Simonson went back to what the Hulk was like in HULK #6: intelligent and articulate, even if he was hot-tempered and violent. In other words, this was a Hulk much like the one we have frequently seen during Peter David's long run on the series in the late 1980s and the 1990s!

The recurring villains in RAMPAGING HULK were an invading race of absurd but dangerous space aliens called the Kryforians. The short, warlike males were humorously grotesque, while on the other hand, Kryforian females, as represented by the Hulk's ally Bereet, were tall and gorgeous.

Immensely entertaining as the RAMPAGING tales were, they did not last long. Even more surprisingly, they were later banished from Marvel's official continuity: the explanation was that they were all "techno-art" special effects movies created by Bereet, who seems to have been the Kryforians' answer to Steven Spielberg. I suspect the reason for thus explaining away these stories was that RAMPAGING's version of the Hulk seemed too far removed from the Hulk's "official" personality. Little did anyone realize that a decade later the smart Hulk would come back into fashion.

Over in the World War II-era stories Roy Thomas was writing for THE INVADERS, Jacqueline Falsworth, the daughter of the original Union Jack, Britain's hero of World War I, became a super heroine herself named Spitfire. Much of the year was taken up by a long storyline set behind enemy lines, which introduced the Nazi super-soldier Master Man's intended mate, Warrior Woman, and featured Adolf Hitler himself as the master villain. Thomas took the opportunity to reintroduce a Golden Age hero created by Stan Lee himself, who could best be described as a wartime version of the Punisher who fought Nazis: the Mighty Destroyer. Actually, this Destroyer turned out to be Union Jack's son, Brian Falsworth, who in the course of the story succeeded his dad as Union Jack and turned over his Destroyer persona to his best friend. And in that year's INVADERS ANNUAL Roy Thomas revisited the Avengers-Invaders battle staged by the alien Grandmaster in AVENGERS #71, this time from the Invaders' point of view!

1977's IRON MAN stories turned Tony Stark's adversary Michael O'Brien into Iron Man's ally, the new Guardsman, introduced the villainous Dreadknight (in a story involving Frankenstein's Monster!), and brought the deceased Mandarin back to life in a new, younger body. And, probably to everyone's surprise, Stark's secretary Krissy Longfellow turned out to be his old ally, Madame Masque, in disguise. She revealed her true identity when their mutual adversary Midas, the billionaire who dressed in ancient Greek style, somehow seized control of Stark Industries. Carried away by their own passions, Tony and Madame Masque, who now knew his dual identity, hid out on a Stark estate to pursue their love affair. Nick Fury, among others, figuratively had to drag them back almost against their will to fight Midas.

Early in the 1970s Marvel had tried to feature some female heroes in their own titles, namely THE CAT (who is now Tigra) and SHANNA THE SHE-DEVIL. Both quickly failed, but in 1977 the company tried again, this time with a heroine who could hold her own in hand-to-hand combat even with super-strong male heroes. This was Carol Danvers, the Cape Canaveral security chief from the CAPTAIN MARVEL series, who had been exposed to the radiation of a Kree device years ago. The delayed effect now endowed her with super-powers, and she became the star of her own series, MS. MARVEL, written by Gerry Conway and drawn by John Buscema. After the first few issues, though, a new writer took over, who was already making a reputation for himself for portraying fiercely independent and formidable heroines: the X-Men's Chris Claremont. And in issue #9 he created a new adversary for Carol who would go on to menace the X-Men themselves: Deathbird, the renegade member of the royal family of the alien Shi'ar Empire.

In another case of a story that seems inevitable, despite its innate silliness, in THOR #255 the Thunder God had a rematch with the alien villains from his very first story, those Easter Island statue lookalikes, the Stone Men from Saturn. In that year's annual Thor teamed up with the Guardians of the Galaxy against the cyborg Korvac, who would in the not too distant future turn into an even greater menace to all the Avengers under the name of Michael, the Enemy. But the most significant event for Thor's future was writer Len Wein's collaboration on the series with artist Walter Simonson. Simonson did magnificent artwork on these 1977 issues,

but they merely foreshadow his long stint as writer and artist on THOR in the 1980s, one of the finest bodies of work in Marvel's history, rivaling even Lee and Kirby's own classic run on THOR.

This was also Jack Kirby's last year writing and drawing the most long-lasting of his co-creations, Captain America. That year's CAP issues are best remembered for the storyline in issues #209 through #212. On his return to Marvel Kirby had ignored all but a few established Marvel characters, apparently preferring to create new ones for Cap to encounter. But now he brought back another of his greatest co-creations, Cap's foremost nemesis, the Red Skull. Kirby gave the Skull an intriguing new philosophical bent,

NOW, IF YOU ARE WISE, FOOL -- YOU WILL LEAVE THIS CITY, RATHER THAN LET ME SET EYES ON YOU AGAIN!
IT APPEARS THE TIME HAS COME FOR YOUNG JIM WILSON TO FEEL THE CRUSHING POWER OF... THE
COUNTESSA!

seeing himself linked inextricably by fate to the Captain. More importantly, Kirby introduced a startling new ally for the Skull, the Nazi genetic engineer Arnim Zola, who had used his science to reconfigure his own body. Hence Kirby gave us the unforgettably grotesque image of Zola's face staring out from the trunk of his own headless body; later, it would be explained that Zola's face was no more than an image on a television screen!

In the 1977 CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL Kirby returned to another of his master villains from the past, the recently revived Magneto, who had put together a brand new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants with all new members. Most of these new Brotherhood members would resurface in the future under the name Mutant Force and later as members of the Resistants in CAPTAIN AMERICA. But the most imaginative of Kirby's creations in this story has never been seen again: Mister One and Mister Two, a single entity who inhabits two bodies, one tiny and helpless and the other large and brutally strong.

1977 also saw the end of Kirby's last great series, THE ETERNALS, which chronicled the war between two superhuman races, the idealized Eternals and the demonic Deviants, with humanity caught in the middle, while the ominous "space gods," the Celestials, silently watched, preparing for an inevitable Day of Judgment. It was in this final year that the Eternal princess Thena descended into the Deviant underworld with her former lover, the Deviant warlord Kro. There, watching the murderous gladiatorial "games" the Deviants staged, Thena first saw two of the warriors: Karkas, whose philosophical soul belied his monstrous appearance, and the Reject, despised by the Deviants for resembling a human in his handsomeness. Thena became a mentor to the Reject, whose nearly feral savagery was reminiscent of Wolverine in his berserker days. Thena's journey ended catastrophically as one of the Celestials invaded the Deviant city, triggering a Biblical-style deluge that engulfed the underground race.

Issue #18 brought the first depiction of the Dreaming Celestial, the renegade space god condemned to burial beneath the Earth, who would threaten the cosmos in years to come in stories written by Walter Simonson for FANTASTIC FOUR and the second ETERNALS series.

But one of the most stunning sights in the whole original ETERNALS series was that in issue #12 of the entire worldwide community of Eternals rising into the sky to combine into a single being, the Uni-Mind, the living embodiment of pure intellect, raised to godlike levels.

With the cancellation of Marvel VISION, we are forced to end the Chronicles series with 1977, twenty-one years before the present day: the space of an entire generation. There is so much still to cover. How Chris Claremont and John Byrne together created two landmark comics epics in UNCANNY X-MEN—The Dark Phoenix saga and "Days of Future Past"—and how X-MEN went on to become the most successful book in comics and gave rise to a still growing family of related titles. How Frank Miller revolutionalized the tone, style, and psychological complexity of super hero comics with his work on DAREDEVIL. How Marvel's Epic line of creator-owned comics evolved under the editorial aegis of the late, much missed Archie Goodwin. How Jim Shooter's SECRET WARS launched the era of company-wide crossovers and "event" comics which still continues today. How Todd McFarlane, Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld and others brought about a generational shift in super hero art styles that changed the look of comics more radically than anything had since the 1960s, and how this new style has itself rapidly metamorphised into the Japanese-influenced look of today's comics. (If you want to know more about Marvel history, you might look for my book, MARVEL UNIVERSE, published by the Harry Abrams company.)

And we still have to resolve 1977's HOWARD THE DUCK diffhanger, in which poor Howard had been transformed into a nondescript human. (Well, believe it or not, a night of passion with a young woman named Amy Pope restored his duckhood, so to speak.) And even to correct the few mistakes that crept into the published versions of past CHRONICLES (Nova was Richard Rider, not Richard Rory. And the Headmen's Ruby Thursday was named after a Rolling Stones song. Thank you, Murray Ward).

The Chronicles leave off at what in hindsight proves to be a milestone, as Jack Kirby, the single most influential creator in American comic books, takes his leave, and two creators of the next generation, Claremont and Byrne are just beginning their work on X-MEN that will set the mold for the super hero team book right into the present day. If the Chronicles must end, this is not at all a bad place to stop.

After all, over the course of Marvel VISION's life, we've managed to cover the comics of the Silver Age of the 1960s, the foundation of everything Marvel has done since, and the stories crafted by the first wave of fans-turned-pros who entered the business, who saw how Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and their colleagues had provided an artistic form through which new writers and artists could express their own personal visions.

To more fully understand and appreciate what Marvel is, you have to have a sense of the richness and complexity of its history, how the stories of today have evolved from the classics of the past, and how characterizations have grown and deepened over the years as they pass through the perspectives of various creators and their times. Each individual story is a new component among the thousands of tales over thirty-six years that make up the ongoing saga of the Marvel Universe, one of the great, if underappreciated, achievements of American popular culture. If the Chronicles have succeeded in imparting to new readers a sense of the grandeur and worth of this long and glorious tapestry of storytelling, then it has done its job well.

By Peter Sanderson

MARVEL CHRONICLES 18

1974 PART 2: THE TWO STEVES

To my mind the best Marvel comics of 1974 were written by two of Marvel's newer writers, Steve Englehart and Steve Gerber. Both of them were by now creating stories that pushed the envelope of the genres in which they worked, demonstrating that the Marvel Revolution was far from over.

With the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union having settled into a somewhat uneasy truce, writers for CAPTAIN AMERICA, like Englehart, faced the challenge of finding new menaces for comics' leading patriotic hero to oppose.

Englehart turned his attention to dangers toward American freedoms that arose from within America itself. His first great success along these lines was his condemnation of anti-Communist fanaticism by having the original Captain battle his obsessed Red-hunting successor from the 1950s in 1973.

In 1974 Englehart created his most memorable CAPTAIN AMERICA storyline, which represented his take on the Watergate scandals of the Nixon presidency. These were formative events for the political attitudes of the baby boomer generation. The revelation of a conspiracy within the White House to cover up crimes was revealed to involve the President himself. This act shattered the implicit faith in the honesty expected of people.

Englehart created the Committee to Regain America's Principles. This agency was clearly an allusion to the Republican Committee to Re-Elect the President. But his was a fictional public, political organization that sought power by illicit means and tried to crush freedom while claiming to uphold it; the Committee was a forerunner of similar groups in the 1990s Marvel Universe such as the Friends of Humanity and Operation: Zero Tolerance.

The Committee sought to gain political influence by discrediting the representative of traditional American ideals, Captain America, by framing him for murder. In his place they put forward their own super hero, the original Moonstone (a man who became known as Nefarius after the current Moonstone, a.k.a. Meteorite of the Thunderbolts, usurped his name and powers).

Cap became a fugitive as he and his partner, the Falcon, sought to clear his name. In the process they discovered that the Committee was a front for the latest incarnation of one of Marvel's many subversive organizations, the Secret Empire. Moreover, the Empire had been busily capturing mutants—including members of the X-Men—and draining their superhuman energies. So that was what had been happening to the X-Men during these years between the demise of their original series and its forthcoming rebirth!

The storyline built to a climax on the White House Lawn where Cap and the Falcon, along with Cyclops and Marvel Girl, faced off against the Empire, which had openly launched a coup d'etat. Cap pursued the Empire's hooded leader, Number One, into the White House. There, in the Oval Office, Number One was unmasked off panel and committed suicide before Cap's horrified eyes.

Who was Number One? Apparently he was a high government official who was greatly trusted, because his unmasking shook Captain America to the core of his being. Deeply disillusioned, Captain America gave up his costumed identity, unwilling any longer to associate himself with the United States government.

Steve Rogers has given up his role as Cap four times in Marvel history. The first time was in

1967, under the auspices of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby themselves, when Steve wanted to retire from his life of danger to live peaceably with his girlfriend Sharon Carter; he soon learned he could not abandon his responsibilities. However, Englehart, like Mark Gruenwald and Mark Waid after him, had divested Rogers of his costumed role for political reasons. Steve Rogers' deep disillusionment with the government reflected, in an extreme way, that of many of his readers at that time.

After just three issues as a plain civilian, Steve realized he still had a duty to fight for right; he simply would not do it under the name of Captain America. Instead, in issue #180, he took on the new role of Nomad, whose name suggested a wanderer without a country. (Two later characters would adopt this costumed identity after Steve gave it up.)

I DON'T REMEMBER FEELING EXACTLY THE WAY I DO NOW SINCE I FIRST BECAME CAPTAIN AMERICA, WAY BACK IN 1941! NO, NOT EVEN WHEN THE AVENGERS PULLED ME FROM THE ICE!
IT'S LIKE BEING REBORN--WITH ALL THE LIES OF THE PAST IN THE PAST, WITH A CLEAR FUTURE WAITING AHEAD, FULL OF ANY-THING I WANT TO FILL IT WITH!

Englehart pitted Rogers as Nomad against what was then a new breed of criminal both in comics and in America: the terrorist. In that issue, Cap's foe, the original Madame Hydra killed the costumed criminal called the Viper and adopted his name. She then took over his old team, the Serpent Squad, and together they went after the Serpent Crown, a power object from the pages of SUB-MARINER.

In collaboration with artist Frank Brunner, Englehart produced what is perhaps his greatest Marvel work: his 1974 run on DOCTOR STRANGE, the best stories for the character since the work of Lee and Ditko. The year began with Strange still confined to the pages of the tryout book, MARVEL PREMIERE, but here readers found a masterpiece. A sorcerer from the far future named Sise-Neg was traveling back in time, absorbing more mystical power as he went. His ultimate goal was to possess all the magical power of the cosmos. At the point in which he arrived back at the beginning of time, he would be, as far as he was concerned, God himself. Doctor Strange and his perennial rival Baron Mordo accompanied this would-be deity in his quest, playing angel and devil respectively, Strange seeking to dissuade Sise-Neg from his evil ends and Mordo trying to manipulate Sise-Neg for his own purposes. On their journey Sise-Neg intervened time and again in mortal history, obliterating Sodom and Gomorrah, and created a paradise-like garden for two of humanity's ancestors.

At last Sise-Neg reached the beginning of time, and Strange and Mordo bore witness as the universe collapsed into blackness. But then, having become one with all, Sise-Neg transcended his petty human ambitions for power: having become a *kind* of god, he realized that the universe was meant to exist the way it had. He reversed the spelling of his name, becoming Genesis, and recreated the cosmos exactly as it had been before.

Englehart's third great series of 1974 was THE AVENGERS, where he chronicled a suspenseful multi-issue battle against Zodiac, began to explore Mantis's mysterious origins in Viet Nam, and dispatched the Avengers to stop Thanos's invading fleet of starships in an epic crossover with Jim Starlin's CAPTAIN MARVEL. Englehart also established that the Scarlet Witch had actual magical abilities in addition to her mutant powers, and had the witch Agatha Harkness begin training her.

It was not Steve Englehart, however, who wrote the first issue of THE AVENGERS' new quarterly companion, GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS. It was, of course, Golden Age enthusiast Roy Thomas who wrote the story that reintroduced two 1940s Marvel heroes, the Whizzer and Miss America, now married and the parents of a mutant son known as Nuklo. This issue also featured flashbacks with the first modern appearance of the late 1940s super team the All-Winners Squad, as well as introducing Bova, the cow endowed with human intelligence and semi-human form by the High Evolutionary. This story purported that the Avengers Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch were also the children of the Whizzer and Miss America, but later tales would establish their true parents to be Magneto and his wife Magda.

The best of that year for THE AVENGERS, however, came at the end when Englehart initiated the saga of the Celestial Madonna. The

team's archenemy, Kang the Conqueror, arrived from the future to find and mate with the woman who was prophesied to become the mother of the most powerful being in the cosmos. Kang learned there were two women who had been groomed for the role by the alien Priests of Pama: Mantis and Moondragon. He captured them both.

But then a new factor entered the equation. Before becoming Kang, the warlord from the future had traveled back to ancient Egypt, where he ruled as the dictatorial Pharaoh Rama-Tut (as most recently seen in THE RISE OF APOCALYPSE limited series). Astonishingly, Englehart revealed that in his sixties Kang would tire of his empty life of conquest and return to ancient Egypt, reassume the role of Rama-Tut, but this time govern benevolently. Now this reformed Rama-Tut appeared in the present day, determined to stop his earlier self, the young Kang, from holding the Celestial Madonna prisoner! GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #2 ended with Kang and Rama-Tut locked in battle as they plunged into the timestream. And the Celestial Madonna saga had only just begun! The drama would intensify in the coming year.

In 1974 Steve Gerber changed the direction of DAREDEVIL, considerably toning down the science fiction aspects introduced into the series, and moving the Man Without Fear back from San Francisco to New York: Daredevil seemed much more at home fighting crime in Manhattan. In issue #108 Gerber also introduced the family of Daredevil's friend Foggy Nelson: his sister Candace, his father, and his mother, who has recently gained new prominence in the book.

Gerber's most personal series, though, was MAN-THING, which started its own comic with the January 1974 issue. This was the grand finale of the saga which pitted the unlikely team of Man-Thing, the young sorceress Jennifer Kale, the eccentric wizard Dakimh, and the extradimensional barbarian warrior Korrek against the demonic Thog the Nether-Spawn and his Congress of Realities, representatives from dimensions throughout all of reality. Thog's objective was to invade Therea, the dimension of the gods. The Man-Thing and his companions thwarted him, and in a memorable sequence Dakimh introduced them to the gods of Therea, who took the form of humanity's best friends: dogs.

But in the struggle one of the good guys was lost: Howard the Duck, who fell into a seemingly bottomless limbo. But Marvel fans would not let Howard vanish from sight forever.

Gerber's MAN-THING stories uniquely blended the eeriness, pathos and psychological insight with moral fables, as well as surreal fantasy with emotional reality. There was the original Foolkiller, a mad vigilante out to slaughter all those he deemed sinful fools. And there was another kind of fool, a recently deceased clown named Darrel, put on trial in Man-Thing's swamp by representatives of the powers of the afterlife to judge the worth of his life. There was Maybelle Tork, whose repressed hatred infused itself into the creatures of the swamp, menacing her backwoodsman husband. And there was "Song-Cry of the Living Dead Man," the saga of an advertising man driven to insanity by the oppressive mediocrity of his existence. These were character studies more than adventure or horror tales, and they were unlike anything else in mainstream comics. Gerber's MAN-THING pointed the way for the sophisticated supernatural fantasy comics that would follow in decades to come.

Elsewhere, Roy Thomas demonstrated the height of his powers as a sword and sorcery writer in three different series: the monthly

CONAN THE BARBARIAN comic book, the new black and white magazine THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, and the new quarterly comic, GIANT-SIZE CONAN. Thomas used the monthly comic to chronicle the progress of Conan's life from his first journey into "civilized" lands, aging Conan in real time, not Marvel time. Early 1974, for example, found young Conan serving as a soldier in the Turanian cavalry, part of the very army he had opposed the previous year. In contrast Thomas used the other CONAN titles to jump ahead to different periods in Conan's life.

With Barry Windsor-Smith's departure, John Buscema was now the artist on the regular CONAN comic and worked on SAVAGE SWORD as well. Buscema's work on the character fused the power of Marvel adventure comics with the realism and period atmosphere of Hal Foster's classic comic strip, Prince Valiant. It was also Buscema who devised the famed iron bikini for Conan's female counterpart, Red Sonja, a costume sported by Sonja impersonators at comics cons in the late 1970s.

But other major artists worked on CONAN as well during these glory years for the series. Neal Adams drew "The Curse of the Golden Skull" in issue #37, a tale that introduced the African warrior Juma, a creation of L. Sprague De Camp and Lin Carter, the first writers to follow Robert E. Howard in continuing the Conan canon. In GIANT-SIZE CONAN Roy Thomas and Gil Kane embarked on a multi-part adaptation of Howard's only CONAN novel, "The Hour of the Dragon," in which a fortyish Conan, newly crowned as king of Aquilonia, fends off a threat to his throne and meets his future queen, Zenobia.

Returning to Steve Englehart, he had left THE DEFENDERS with the final issue of 1973 and was succeeded by the prolific Len Wein, who soon reformed Nighthawk, a member of the Squadron Sinister, and inducted him into the Defenders, replacing founding member Sub-Mariner. In DEFENDERS' later 1974 issues Wein introduced that long-running team of villains, the Wrecking Crew—Bulldozer, Piledriver, and Hammerhead —and made Lee and Kirby's villain from THOR, the Wrecker, their leader. The Hulk left the Defenders with this storyline, leaving only one of the founders, Dr. Strange, an active member.

In retrospect, perhaps the most significant DEFENDERS story Len Wein wrote that year was in issues #15 and #16. With the X-Men busy with the Secret Empire storyline in CAPTAIN AMERICA, Professor Xavier teamed with the Defenders against Magneto and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. This time Magneto had genetically engineered an artificial being with enormous psionic powers: Alpha the Ultimate Mutant. But Alpha rebelled against his maker and transformed Magneto and his henchmen back into crying, helpless infants.

This was far from the end of Magneto, of course, but this turn of events would have repercussions that lasted down even to the debut of the second X-MEN series in the 1990s.

This was also far from the end of Len Wein's involvement with Professor X. In the following year, Len Wein and Dave Cockrum would recreate the X-Men in a way destined to make them Marvel's top-selling super heroes in years to come.

—Peter Sanderson

NO, DOCTOR--DON'T TURN AWAY--OR YOU MAY DENY YOURSELF THE CHANCE TO SEE A MIRACLE!
TURN, MY FRIENDS--LOOK AT HIM!
BEHOLD THE CREATURE WHO SOON WILL MAKE ME MASTER OF THE WORLD!!
BY THE ANCIENT ONE'S EYES! WHAT HORROR HAS MAGNETO WROUGHT?
AFRAID YOU'LL HAVE TO WAIT TILL NEXT ISSUE TO LEARN THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE, MARVELITE--BUT WE STRONGLY SUGGEST YOU BE HERE TO MEET...
ALPHA